Evaluating the Presence of Greek Tourism-Related Public Sector Entities in Online Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

Social networks have become one of the most popular tools in promoting the tourism product. This applies to National Tourism Agencies, as well as tourism-related general government bodies (GGBs) and local authorities (LAs). This study examines such organizations alongside selected chief administration officials (CAOs) that are related with the tourism sector and attempts to evaluate their presence in three social networks: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In order to do so, this article builds upon and expands on existing social networks' metrics, incorporating them into metrics of online followership. The quantitative analysis results in a ranking of best performers, from which the authors select three good performers in order to follow with a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. By merging the quantitative results with the feedback from the interviews the authors propose a basic normative social networks management toolkit for tourism-related public entities, found to be comprised of six thematic axes.

KEYWORDS

Facebook, Management, Online Engagement, Online Followership, Online Social Networks, Social Media, Tourism, Twitter, YouTube

INTRODUCTION

The Spread of Social Networks

Moving from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has, undoubtedly, revised the internet user's passive relationship with the websites' material, allowing greater interrelationship via social networks and other User Generated Content services (O'Reilly, 2007; Bertot et al., 2012). For this reason, social networks (social media) have manifested massive rates of proliferation among internet users (Qualman, 2010; Fuchs, 2017). This trend seems to be strengthened by the wide use of other forms of computing – apart from the classic personal computer (desktop or laptop) – like for example tablets, pads and smart-phones. According to the Global Web Index (2015), the average global user spends around 28% of his internet time at social networks. If we add to this the corresponding shares of micro-blogging and blogging (13% and 9% respectively), then we reach a quota of 50%. Therefore, it would not be farfetched to propose that the average user spends almost half of his/her internet time on some sort of

social network. In reality, social networks provide for a new form of communication and networking between agents, helping them to: create and sustain social bonds (Ellison, 2007; Riva et al., 2016), exchange information and experiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Osatuyi. 2013) and socially interact with each other (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

In the same time, the deep digital penetration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in modern households and users all around the world, offers inevitably a number of opportunities for both the private and public sector (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). On the one hand, the private sector seems to have found a novel, direct and quite economical way to promote its products, addressing them also to younger and more dynamic audiences (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Scott, 2015). Furthermore, firms have a chance to actively involve consumers in the co-formation of the final product (Heinonen, 2011; Sashi. 2012; Rathore at el., 2016). Especially in terms of marketing and operational research, consumers seem to adopt a more active role in co-creating the marketing content (Hanna et al., 2011; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). In other words, social networks are increasingly treated by corporations as separate - to the production - ecosystems that act both as promoting services and as mechanisms of appropriating co-created value (Pitelis & Teece, 2010).

On the other hand, the public sector can use social networks, in order to communicate public policies or increase their smartness (Gil-Garcia et al., 2016). The interesting with social networks is that citizens not only receive information regarding public policies, but can also respond to it, expressing their opinion regarding the policy in real time (Porter, 2008). In this line of thought, Bertot et al. (2012) suggest that social networks can provide three general capabilities to the Public Sector: (1) enhance democratic participation and citizens' engagement, promoting in this way the public sector-citizens dialogue (McClurg, 2003; Dahlgren, 2009; Papaloi et al., 2012; Bonson et al., 2015; Knox, 2016), (2) assist the co-production of public policies, allowing policy-making to be both a top-down and bottom-up process (Sabatier, 1986; Linders, 2012), and (3) lead to innovation and crowd-sourcing solutions, under the necessary condition of open availability of (non-sensitive) data on the part of the State (Haklay et al., 2014; Carfagno & Parnell, 2016).

The relevance of the above capabilities extends from social networks to all forms of Web 2.0 functions that could enhance communication between citizens and government officials (i.e. open governance, public consultation of laws, etc.). For these reasons, social networks are used more and more by public entities as e-governance and open government enablers (Osimo, 2008; Bertot et al., 2010; Bonson et al., 2012; Magro, 2012; Mergel and Bretschneider, 2013; Snead, 2013; Zavattaro, 2013; Boulianne, 2015). In this context, Bonson et al. (2012) propose that the two major benefits of social networks for Public Entities are transparency and citizens' engagement.

Social Networks and Government Agencies

The use of social networks by government agencies has boomed during the last years, as they have provided a new form of government-citizen communication. The penetration of social networks has been supported by the introduction and prevalence of ICTs in government over the past decades that have improved transparency, accountability and have mitigated the feeling of the democratic deficit (Hague & Loader, 1999; Bertot et al., 2010; Bertot, et al., 2012a). In this context, social networks have been regarded by government agencies not only as another tool to provide information and services to citizens, but also as a mean to allow them to participate in the production of public policies (O'Reilly, 2007; Linders, 2012). The overarching opportunities that social networks offer to the government-citizen relationship are highlighted by Medaglia & Zheng (2017) as the ability to foster "community building." Indeed, social networks enhance the creation of social capital both on a bonding (i.e. emotional) and bridging (i.e. novel information, tangible outcomes from social networking) level (Putnam, 2000; Ellison et al., 2010).

The adoption of social networks by government agencies is not, of course, an automatic process, but instead passes through various stages until it reaches an adequate level of diffusion and embracement. Mergel & Bretschneider (2013) propose a 3-staged process model that describes,

in a general and descriptive way, how government agencies treat ICTs, like social networks, in the course of time. At the first stage, agencies tend to informally experiment with the platform and the capabilities that the technology offers. After the chaotic first stage they move to the next one, at which they recognize the need to develop rules and regulation for these technologies. Finally, at the last stage, they move towards formalizing strategies and policies regarding the management of such technologies.

While the diffusion of social networks is indeed a reality in government agencies, the ability of the agencies to evaluate the response of the networks to citizens remains rather constrained (Bertot et al., 2012b; Lee & Kwak, 2012; Mergel, 2013). One of the reasons why this happens is that government social networks are not hosted by internal webservers, but by third parties (Mergel, 2013). Therefore, government cannot control the technological features and specifications of the social network applications. On management terms, many government agencies, especially in market-oriented sectors, outsource the management of their accounts to third parties, as their personnel lacks in terms of know-how of social media management.

In the same vein, Wang et al. (2016) and Medaglia & Zheng (2017) note that there are certain gaps in the existing efforts to systemize research in the field of government social media. After examining 93 articles on government social media, they propose six focus categories that government social media researchers should try to examine more thoroughly, namely platform properties, management, user characteristics, user behavior, context and social media effects. In this way they provide the general outline of a social media research agenda.

Studying the literature on social networks, one could argue that they could be used by an organization (including a government one) for five (5) general reasons:

1. For the promotion of a product, namely the promotion of the tourism product, to a very wide audience (Pan et al., 2007; Lew, 2008), while in the same time to enhance the image of the organization in the market (Dippelreiter et al., 2008; Akehurst, 2009; Huang, 2011). Holding the leadership or dominance in promoting information in a sector may become a flagship for all auxiliary functions that the organization may provide (Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Inversini and Cantoni, 2011);
2. For the distribution of a product, i.e. to serve the potential customer in finding what he/she wants and making reservations, even electronically (Akehurst, 2009; Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Noone et al., 2011);
3. For the communication between providers and users, in terms of developing a communication channel between the client and the supplier of the tourism product (Ellion, 2007). Communication can serve in terms of customer service *per se* or in order to provide effective after-sale services (Akehurst, 2009; Pantelidis, 2010; Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Sigala, 2011);
4. For the management of the provider's internal communications, i.e. using social networks accounts in-house for vocational training, internal information exchange and communications (Fuchs et al., 2009; Inversini et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2011);
5. For reasons of Research and Development (R&D) of the tourism product, namely data management and users analytics, so that there is continuous product improvement and identification with what users and potential customers want (Dippelreiter et al., 2008; Akehurst, 2009; Huang, 2011; Sigala, 2011; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2014).

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE TOURISM PRODUCT

The tourism product is rather unique, in comparison to other conventional products. First of all, we are dealing with a service of immaterial substance, which is also accompanied by various material characteristics (Jefferson & Lickorish, 1988). Furthermore, tourism is an experience that the traveler cognitively holds long after the termination of the physical dimension of the trip (Smith, 1994;

Prebensen et al., 2012). The complex nature of the tourism product implies that it can be affected by a multitude of factors that are not always a part of the producer's internal environment.

The complexity of the tourism product burdens Public Entities with an equally complex mission. On the one hand, organizations activated in the tourism sector should behave as marketers of the tourism product, trying to attract as many potential customers as possible. On the other hand, they have to assist the traveler (the customer) during his stay in the country with any problem or query that may arise. Finally, the experiential nature of the tourism product (Smith, 1994) necessitates maintaining communication links with the customer, so that a traveler would be motivated to visit again the country in the future and "advertise" his/her own tourist experience to fellow would-be travelers abroad. Milano et al. (2011) propose that organizations involved in tourism promotion should aim at three critical periods of travelling: (1) pre-arrival period (pre-experience), (2) period of stay (experience during travel or stay), and (3) post-travel period (post-experience). In this vein, social networks could play a significant role in all of the above periods of travel, since they can meet immediate and ongoing interaction with the potential client (Hvass and Munar, 2012).

The insertion of social networks in tourism management has imposed a rather fundamental change in the circuit of tourism promotion, as depicted in Figure 1.

The left side of Figure 1 portrays the traditional schema of tourism promotion that involves: tourists, travel agencies and state public entities (i.e. Ministry of Tourism or Greek National Tourism Organizations - NTOs). More specifically, the potential "customer" perceives the tourism campaign via conventional forms of advertising (i.e. outdoor ads, T.V. spots and travel magazines or tourist guides) and is mobilized to visit a travel agency and book his/her trip. In this traditional schema state public entities develop communication channels with big travel agencies and operators all around the world, in order to promote the tourism product in a more efficient way. The right side of Figure 1 shows the radical change in the circuit that new technologies and social networks bring, namely that social networks co-exist – if not gradually replace – conventional advertising. In the same time, they provide an intermediate and interacting node between Public Entities, travel agencies and citizens.

Social networks provide, indeed, a new terrain that individuals, the public sector and the private economy can interact, share information and indeed co-produce the tourism product (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Leung et al., 2013). Special interest has been cast in the literature regarding the use of social media by tourism-related public organizations, like for example national tourism organizations. Dwivedi et al. (2011) have tried to determine the extent of use, as well as the popularity, of various

Figure 1. Traditional (1) vs. Social network-enhanced (2) schema of tourism product promotion (Source: The authors)
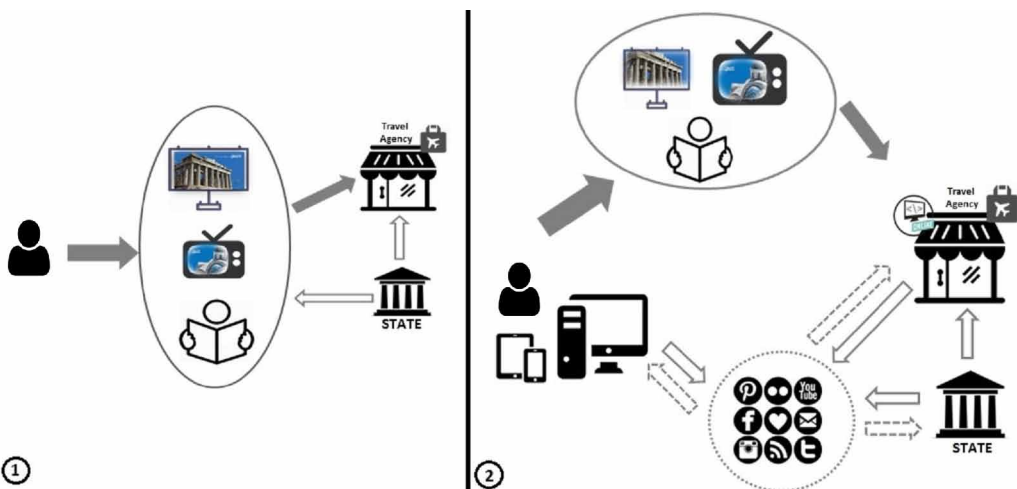
social networks by National Tourism Organizations, underlining in their findings the supremacy of Facebook. The same findings regarding Facebook and its significance as an effective marketing strategy tool have been provided by Stankov et al. (2010). Hays et al. (2013) have highlighted the ability of social media to act like effective destination marketing tools that could significantly assist tourism promotion public policy. In fact, as Pike (2016) notes, even the promotional role *per se* of NTOs and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) is challenged by the overwhelming impact of social media, putting new opportunities and threats on the table of tourism promotion policies.

This intrinsic impact of social media on the tourism sector was the main reason for choosing it as a case study. Furthermore, the selection of Greece, while inevitably connected with the overall scope of the research project of the Greek National Centre of Public Administration and Local Governance, was also attributed to the significance of the tourism sector in the Greek economy.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This paper focuses on evaluating the presence of General Government Bodies (GGBs), Local Authorities (LAs) and selected Chief Administration Officials (CAOs) that are related with the tourism sector in three social networks which show the most significant penetration in Greece. The sample was Greek GGBs and LAs that had direct or indirect relation with tourism promotion and management, as listed in the "*General Government Body Register ESA 2010*" of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.). Based on this rationale and from a total population of 1.506 GGBs, we selected an initial sample of 223 Bodies[1]. In this sample, we added 5 CAOs that held important public niches (i.e. Minister of Tourism, Mayor of Athens (2 accounts), Mayor of Thessaloniki and Attica Prefecture Governor). Thus the total size of the initial sample was 228 entities.

Research Questions

The current paper presents findings by a project carried out at the Greek National Centre of Public Administration and Local Governance on the "*Study and Evaluation of the Digital Presence of Greek Public Administration Bodies and Local Authorities in Collective Digital Media*". Exploring government agencies at all policy spaces was apparently and enormous task. For this reason, the research focused solely on the tourism sector, as it constitutes a critical share of the Greek domestic product. Therefore, the main research question was:

RQ1: How tourism related General Government Agencies and Local Authorities perform in popular social networks?

Following the rationale of Kietzmann et al. (2011), Lee & Kwak (2012) and Bonson & Ratkai (2013, 2015), we focused our evaluation on critical success factors criteria like user engagement, as it best describes the participatory and networking character of social media. Nevertheless, our basic problem was that the Bonson & Ratkai (2013) offered metrics only for Facebook. Hence, our second research task was:

RQ2: To develop evaluation metrics for other popular social media platforms, namely Twitter and YouTube.

As far as we know, similar sets of metrics adapted for these two platforms have not been analyzed in the literature. Furthermore, we do not confine the definition of online user engagement to popularity, commitment and virality, but we also incorporate online followership measurement metrics.

While the quantitative part is valuable in terms of user engagement, it does not offer significant explanations in terms of management of social networks accounts by government agencies. The scope

of the project was not only to evaluate the presence of public administration in social media, but also to understand how these agencies choose to manage their social media accounts.

RQ3: What are the basic principles that should govern a public policy for the management of social networks of government agencies?

In order to achieve the above research task, we conducted a qualitative analysis with the help of semi-structured interview with three (3) government agencies that scored fairly well in the quantitative stage, depending also on agencies' availability.

Through both the quantitative and qualitative analysis we extracted useful insights regarding the philosophy of handling such social networks accounts by government agencies, aspects of their strategic orientation, elements connected with the management of the accounts, as well as exploring the dynamics that shape the tourism promotional mix of public administration.

We find that the spread of social media in the tourism product promotion alters significantly the schema of conventional tourism promotion, as well as the role that public administration entities could/should play in this. Finally, we propose a general social media management toolkit for government agencies.

In a sense, the current paper tries to approach the Medaglia & Zheng (2017) research agenda both at the management and user behavior level, borrowing insights not only by the literature on social media management by government agencies (Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2014; Vogt et al., 2014; Johannessen et al., 2016), but also from more business and marketing oriented studies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Defining and Charting the Research Sample

At a first stage, we charted the presence of the sample in all forms of social networks, with special reference to the three more widespread in Greece (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). In order to get stable and comparable results we assumed that a social network account can be considered as officially belonging to an entity, if and only if there is a link directing to this account from this entity's official website. With this hypothesis in mind, we measured a number of quantitative indices for the three social networks (age, number of posts, following and followers' metrics, etc).

We then proceeded to partitioning this sample according to certain Liveness Criteria that we defined. This was made because we wanted to categorize social media accounts depending on how energetic and live they were, scoping at a next research stage to focus our study and analysis only to those that were in practice active, excluding accounts that while officially existed, in fact were hardly operable. The critical hard liveness criterion focused on a live presence during the second quarter of 2015 (Q2/2015), which coincided with the opening of the tourism season in the Greek market. In this respect, a number of assumptions were made:

Assumption 1: An entity satisfies a Hard Liveness Criterion, if and only if they have made at least one (1) post/tweet/upload in their social network accounts during Q2/2015.
Assumption 2: An entity satisfies a Soft Liveness Criterion, if and only if the most recent post/tweet/upload in their social network accounts has been made during the period July 2014 - March 2015 (Q3/2014-Q1/2015).

Assumption 2 was made in order to account also for entities that presented some form of fair periodicity or seasonality in their activities (e.g. entities active for winter/summer holidays or seasonal festivals).

Assumption 3: An entity satisfies a Criterion of Zombie Inertia, if and only if the most recent post on their social networks accounts has been made before June 2014 (Q2/2014 or older).

Calculating Engagement Indices

Based on the final research sample formulated as above, we employed the methodology of Papaloi et al. (2012), Bonson & Ratkai (2013) and Bonson & Ratkai (2015), in order to calculate indices that measured the degree of users' engagement in social networks. Bonson & Ratkai (2013) developed a set of metrics for the case of Facebook, which measure the engagement and social legitimacy of stakeholders. These metrics were developed in order to capture the elements of popularity, commitment, virality and engagement in a quantitative way (see Table 1).

Table 1. Facebook metrics for online user engagement (Bonson and Ratkai, 2013)

Category	Metric	Formula	Description
Popularity	P1	$\dfrac{Number\ of\ Posts\ Liked}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Percentage of posts that have been liked
	P2	$\dfrac{Total\ Likes}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Average number of likes per post
	P3	$\left(\dfrac{P2}{Number\ of\ Fans}\right)*1.000$	Average number of likes per post per 1000 fans
Commitment	C1	$\dfrac{Number\ of\ Posts\ Commented}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Percentage of posts that have been commented
	C2	$\dfrac{Total\ Comments}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Average number of comments per post
	C3	$\left(\dfrac{C2}{Number\ of\ Fans}\right)*1.000$	Average number of comments per post per 1000 fans
Virality	V1	$\dfrac{Number\ of\ Posts\ Shared}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Percentage of posts that have been shared
	V2	$\dfrac{Total\ Shares}{Total\ Number\ of\ Posts}$	Average number of shares per post
	V3	$\left(\dfrac{V2}{Number\ of\ Fans}\right)*1.000$	Average number of shares per post per 1000 fans
Online User Engagement	E.F.[2]	$P3+C3+V3$	Stakeholder online user engagement index

Based on this methodology for Facebook, we proceeded with some extensions so as to fit the cases of Twitter and YouTube (see Tables 2 and 3). Concerning Twitter and Facebook, these two social networks present similar criteria of popularity, commitment and virality.

Concerning YouTube, things were a bit more complex. The basic problems were the following:

- Comments are usually de-activated by administrators, due to offensive content. This creates problems in the calculation of metrics of commitment;
- The presence of the dislike button, presents differences with the other two social networks (Twitter and Facebook);
- Unlike Twitter and Facebook, in YouTube it is difficult to calculate the degree of sharedness of a video (virality).

Table 2. Twitter metrics for online user engagement, extending the work of Bonson and Ratkai (2013)

Category	Metric	Formula	Description
Popularity	P1	$\dfrac{Number\,of\,Tweets\,Favourited}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweets}$	Percentage of tweets that have been favourited
	P2	$\dfrac{Total\,Favourites}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweets}$	Average number of favourites per tweet
	P3	$\left(\dfrac{P2}{Number\,of\,Followers}\right)*1.000$	Average number of favourites per tweet per 1000 followers
Commitment	C1	$\dfrac{Number\,of\,Tweets\,Commented}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweets}$	Percentage of tweets that have been commented
	C2	$\dfrac{Total\,Comments}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweets}$	Average number of comments per tweet
	C3	$\left(\dfrac{C2}{Number\,of\,Followers}\right)*1.000$	Average number of comments per tweet per 1000 followers
Virality	V1	$\dfrac{Number\,of\,Tweets\,Retweeted}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweet}$	Percentage of tweets that have been retweeted
	V2	$\dfrac{Total\,Retweets}{Total\,Number\,of\,Tweets}$	Average number of retweets per tweet
	V3	$\left(\dfrac{V2}{Number\,of\,Followers}\right)*1.000$	Average number of retweets per tweet per 1000 followers
Online User Engagement	E.T.[3]	$P3+C3+V3$	Stakeholder online user engagement index

Table 3. YouTube metrics for online user engagement, extending the work of Bonson and Ratkai (2013)

Category	Metric	Formula	Description
Popularity	P1	$$\dfrac{Number\,of\,Videos\,with\,a\,Net\,Approval}{Total\,Number\,of\,Videos}$$	Percentage of videos that have a net approval
	P2	$$\dfrac{Aggregate\,of\,Net\,Approval\,Ratings}{Total\,Number\,of\,Videos}$$	Average number of net approval ratings per video
	P3	$$\left(\dfrac{P2}{Number\,of\,Subscribers}\right)*1.000$$	Average number of net approval ratings per video per 1000 subscribers
Virality	V1	$$\dfrac{Number\,of\,Videos\,that\,were\,Viewed}{Total\,Number\,of\,Videos}$$	Percentage of videos that have been viewed
	V2	$$\dfrac{Aggregate\,of\,Total\,Views}{Total\,Number\,of\,Videos}$$	Average number of views per video
	V3	$$\left(\dfrac{V2}{Number\,of\,Subscribers}\right)*1.000$$	Average number of views per video per 1000 followers
Online User Engagement	E.Y.[4]	$P3+V3$	Stakeholder online user engagement index

In order to address these problems, we proceeded to calculate an index for YouTube engagement without considering a metric for commitment, by making two important assumptions:

Assumption 4: As a metric of popularity for videos posted on YouTube, we define the net approval rating, which is calculated as the net difference between Likes and Dislikes.

Assumption 5: We consider that the total views of a video posted on YouTube can serve as a metric of the virality of this video (word-of-mouth and end-destination of various links).

Alongside these modified engagement metrics of Bonson & Ratkai (2013), we have also applied some online followership metrics, in order to evaluate the performance of social network accounts that satisfied the Hard Liveness criterion. These include three metrics that belong in two categories: (1) account activity, and (2) degree of user attraction. More specifically, we wanted to check how active were social network accounts in terms of posting, tweeting or uploading, and how efficient these accounts were in terms of attracting new fans, followers or subscribers (see Table 4).

Calculations of the online user engagement and online followership metrics were performed during a period of 7 consecutive days (measurement period) at the end of Q2/2015, under the following assumptions:

Assumption 6 (refers to Facebook): We count the posts made anytime during Q2/2015, and the comments accumulated during the measurement period at the end of Q2/2015.

Assumption 7 (refers to Facebook and Twitter): Given that, for practical reasons of the time required for measurement, the measurement period needs to have a non-trivial duration of 7 calendar days,

Table 4. Metrics for online followership measurement

Category	Metric	Formula	Description
Twitter			
Activity	ACV	$$\dfrac{Total\ Number\ of\ Tweets}{Age\ of\ Account}$$	average number of tweets per month
Attraction	A1	$$\dfrac{Total\ Number\ of\ Followers}{Age\ of\ Account}$$	average attraction of followers per month
	A2	$$\dfrac{Total\ Number\ of\ Followers}{Total\ Number\ of\ Tweets}$$	average attraction of followers per tweet
Online Followership	F.T.	$ACV+A1+A2$	
Facebook[5]			
Attraction	A1 = F.F.	$$\dfrac{Total\ Number\ of\ Followers}{Age\ of\ Account}$$	average attraction of followers per month
YouTube			
Attraction	A1 = F.Y.	$$\dfrac{Total\ Number\ of\ Subscribers}{Age\ of\ Account}$$	Average attraction of subscribers per month

we assume that the phenomenon that we study does not evolve during the measurement period. In other words, we assume that the quantities measured do not change significantly during the measurement period, so that social network accounts whose activity is measured at the end of the measurement period are not favored with respect to accounts whose activity has been measured at the beginning of this period (in which case posts/tweets and social actions had up to 7 days less to accumulate).

Assumption 8 (refers to Facebook and Twitter): With respect to comments, we count comments per se, and also replies eventually given by other users or the owner entity of the account.

Assumption 9: We choose to count all types of posts, tweets or videos (not only those of tourism-related content), since they all contribute to the activity of the corresponding account.

Assumption 10: Likes or favourites, and shares or retweets, are only counted for the original post or tweet (but not for comments, replies, etc.).

Finally, after the calculation of online user engagement and online followership metrics we adopted an approach of relative benchmarking analysis, in order to end up with results that would exhibit comparative value, as well as explanatory significance. The steps of this relative benchmarking approach are described in Table 5.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Based on the results of the benchmarking analysis we conducted a sampling for tourism content for the last 15-20 posts for each account and we finalized a sample of 3 organizations of good performers for further qualitative analysis. At this stage, we were not interested in the quantitative elements that

Table 5. Relative benchmarking steps

Step 1	Calculate the online user engagement and online followership metrics for each entity.
Step 2	Conversion to relative scores, with the best score being (No of Entities – 1). - Facebook: 0, 1, 2, …, 81 - Twitter: 0, 1, 2, …, 38 - YouTube: 0, 1, 2, …, 24
Step 3	Stabilize for every Social Networking Platform, with respect to the total number of entities (89 in total).
Step 4	Arrange in a descending order.

boosted efficiency, but rather in tracing the procedures, rules and strategies that led the accounts at greater engagement and followership.

Semi-structured interviews with the responsible administrators of the accounts were conducted, namely real-time meeting and discussion with the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) and The Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (ADDMA) and an electronic interview with the Municipality of Kalamata (MoK). At GNTO we met with the Head of the Department of Publications and Audiovisual Media and two members of the social media management team. At ADDMA we met with the Project Manager and Head of social media management team. Finally, the electronic interview for the case of MoK was carried out with the Head of the Department of Communication & Public Relations of the Municipality of Kalamata.

The discussion was open and not structured in a solid way, but instead it was carried out as an open conversation that let administrators to submit their own views on how they perceived tourism product promotion policies and how they manage their social media accounts. Of course, during the conversation, we oriented it appropriately based on a pre-set structure of questions addressing the following thematics:

- Analyzing the user philosophy of the social media accounts;
- Expanding on elements of strategic orientation and connection with the Strategic and Business Plan of the organization;
- Referring to administrative issues of the accounts *per se*: in-house administration or out-sourcing to third parties, procedures of approving posts' content, elements of scheduling posts;
- Tracing activities of followership and user engagement enhancement, via analytics or other evaluation methods;
- Discussing elements of tourism promotion and determining the target audience.

Finally, the information from the transcripts of the interviews was systemized in the aforementioned themes.

QUANTITAVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Presence of Greek Tourism-Related GGBs and LAs in Online Social Networks: The Big Picture

As noted previously, the total sample of the tourism-related GGBs, LAs and Individuals (directly or indirectly related to tourism) was 228 entities. It was fortunate that the website compliance rate of this sample was quite high – around 84%.

The general picture of the possession rates of a social network account is that almost 1 out of 2 entities operate a Facebook fan page, group or account (42.11%). Twitter (24.56%) and YouTube

(24.56%) are less popular choices, but still second-best solutions. Other social networks are not so widespread yet in the Greek public sector (i.e. Instagram at 2.63%).

Another interesting finding is that almost one out of two (50.44%) Public Entities keep only one type of social network account, with two types of accounts held by almost two out ten entities (19.30%), whereas the rates of keeping three, four or more accounts fall further below (12.28%, 12.28% and 5.71% respectively).

The findings regarding the legal form of the Public Entities participating in the sample prove that a 40.79% of them are Legal Entities under Private Law (LEUPLs), while 31.58% are LAs.

Concerning the age of the accounts at the three basic social networks, the average age moves in the 34.98 – 38.80 months frame, with no significant differences from the respective median age.

How Alive are Social Network Accounts of Greek Tourism-Related GGBs, LAs and CAOs?

During the general charting stage of the initial sample, it became apparent that many organizations were operating social network accounts, but in reality, did not update them systematically or on a daily or weekly basis. As a result, in these cases the rates of engagement with Greek citizens or other international internet users were rather limited or – in some cases – completely absent. For this reason, and in order to study a reliable sample for which we could evaluate the performance of organizations in terms of online user engagement and online followership, we applied the 3 types of liveness criteria as analyzed in the "Research Design and Methods" section.

In Twitter, seven out of ten entities are operating accounts that fulfill the Hard Liveness Criterion (at least one tweet in Q2/2015). Moreover, "zombie accounts" reach a 18.18%, as seen in Table 6.

In Facebook, the liveness rates are really high, with nine out ten entities meeting the hard liveness criterion. This somehow highlights the popular dimension of this social network and its ability to appeal to a broad audience. For this reason, organizations that choose to open a Facebook account, usually keep it alive, feeding it constantly with relevant material. For all criteria see Table 7.

Finally, in YouTube, the rates connected with soft liveness and zombie inertia are significantly higher than those of the other two networks (27.27% respectively). This can be partially attributed to the difficulty of constantly preparing audio-visual material and uploading it at the relevant channels. For all results see Table 8.

Hence the sample of GGBs, LAs and CAOs that was further evaluated in terms of online user engagement and online followership comprised 89 entities. More specifically, we examined further metrics for 39 Twitter accounts, 82 Facebook fan pages[6] and 25 YouTube channels.

Table 6. Liveness rates for Twitter; liveness periods have been defined backwards with respect to the study timeframe (mid-2015)

Liveness Criteria	Sample	%
Hard Liveness	39	70.91%
most recent post during 01/04/2015-30/06/2015		
Soft Liveness	6	10.91%
most recent post during 01/07/2014 - 31/03/2015		
Zombie Inertia	10	18.18%
most recent post on or before 30/06/2014		
TOTAL	55	100.00%

Table 7. Liveness rates for Facebook; liveness periods have been defined backwards with respect to the study timeframe (mid-2015)

Liveness Criteria	Sample	%
Hard Liveness	88	91.67%
most recent post during 01/04/2015-30/06/2015		
Soft Liveness	3	3.13%
most recent post during 01/07/2014 - 31/03/2015		
Zombie Inertia	5	5.21%
most recent post on or before 30/06/2014		
TOTAL	96	100.00%

Table 8. Liveness rates for YouTube; liveness periods have been defined backwards with respect to the study timeframe (mid-2015)

Liveness Criteria	Sample	%
Hard Liveness	25	45.45%
most recent post during 01/04/2015-30/06/2015		
Soft Liveness	15	27.27%
most recent post during 01/07/2014 - 31/03/2015		
Zombie Inertia	15	27.27%
most recent post on or before 30/06/2014		
TOTAL	55	100.00%

Evaluating Best Performers

The calculation of the data series necessary for evaluating online user engagement and online followership metrics was conducted during a period of 7 consecutive days in the end of July 2015 and constrained to content posted in the second quarter (Q2) of this year. After calculating the metrics, scores were normalized with the benchmarking procedure described in Table 5. The resulting ranking gave us a list of best performers. In Table 9, one can see the top-20 ranking of GGBs (LEUPLs and Public Entities), LAs and CAOs. We should note that all scores are normalized for the total population of the sample, namely 89 entities.

Based on the results of the relative benchmarking exercise, we can make some observations and comments.

First, only five out of twenty entities do not hold a YouTube channel and only one does not have a Facebook account. Hence, these twenty entities present some kind of homogeneity as to keeping accounts in all three social networks under study.

Second, in the above list one can trace three individuals (CAOs), while the rest of the entities comprise LEUPLs, LAs or Public Entities. In the initial sample of 228 entities, only five of them were CAOs. Thus, the final presence of three out of five individuals in the best performers Top-20 is a rather successful indicator for their effectiveness operating their social network accounts. This could be partially attributed to the wide recognition of these individuals (Marwick and Boyd, 2011), as well as to the importance of their public offices (minister, governor, mayor). In general, personal accounts seem to boost the metrics of both online user engagement and online followership, as users seem to identify themselves more easily with an eponymous public figure, like proposed in the literature (Click et al., 2013; Jin & Phua, 2014; Kowalczyk et al., 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017).

Table 9. Top-20 ranking of GGBs (LEUPLs and Public Entities), LAs and CAOs

Rank	LF[7]	Unit	E.T.[8]	F.T.[9]	E.F.[10]	F.F.[11]	E.Y.[12]	F.Y.[13]	Total
1	3	Minister of Tourism – Helena Kountoura	66.18	82.15	69.46	66.21	64.08	42.72	390.80
2	1	National Opera	36.51	70.74	54.27	80.32	46.28	78.32	366.44
3	4	Greek National Tourism Organization	52.49	86.72	31.48	87.91	10.68	85.44	354.72
4	2	Municipality of Kalamata	18.26	50.21	56.44	75.98	85.44	39.16	325.48
5	1	Greek Festival S.A.	79.87	43.36	28.22	79.23	32.04	60.52	323.24
6	1	National Museum of Contemporary Art	43.36	45.64	42.33	72.72	78.32	24.92	307.29
7	1	National Theatre of Northern Greece	38.79	68.46	18.45	78.15	24.92	71.20	299.97
8	2	Municipality of Xanthi	61.62	38.79	32.56	64.04	49.84	46.28	293.13
9	1	Thessaloniki Concert Hall Organization	34.23	57.05	34.73	71.63	28.48	64.08	290.21
10	3	Mayor of Athens – George Kaminis	75.31	79.87	78.15	54.27			287.59
11	2	Prefecture of Crete	20.54	63.90	5.43	30.39	81.88	81.88	284.01
12	3	Governor of Attica – Rena Dourou	57.05	84.44	51.01	84.66			277.16
13	1	Municipality of Rhodes – Tourism Promotion Agency	70.74	29.67	59.70	67.29	17.80	28.48	273.68
14	1	Municipality of Athens – Development and Tourism Promotion Company S.A. (*This Is Athens*)	77.59	75.31	45.59	65.12			263.60
15	4	Municipality of Athens – Organization of Culture, Youth and Sports	59.33	34.23	39.07	47.76	60.52	21.36	262.27
16	2	Municipality of Larissa	63.90	52.49	72.72	70.55			259.65
17	2	Municipality of Herakleion	22.82	54.77	6.51	56.44	56.96	53.40	250.90
18	1	National Theatre			36.90	81.40	42.72	74.76	235.78
19	4	Management Body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland			55.35	77.06	74.76	17.80	224.97
20	2	Municipality of Chios	73.03	27.38	62.95	58.61			221.97

Third, in a way similar to the basic descriptive data that we calculated at the general charting of our initial sample, also here we witness the quantitative supremacy of LEUPLs. This attests the fact that entities operating under private order are far more flexible, with less bureaucratic structures and better strategic orientation (Boyne, 2002). In the Top-20 list of best performers eight entities are LEUPLs (40%), six are LAs (30%), three are CAOs (15%) and another 15% are Public Entities. This was something also raised during the interviews of the qualitative stage.

Fourth, LAs seem to present higher engagement rates than GGBs. This could be partially attributed to the fact that municipalities and local governments (even in cases of individual officers) target at a more limited geographical audience that can be easily traced. Furthermore, people are more interested in participating and getting informed for issues that have to do with local communities, whose effects are experienced more directly (Bonson et al., 2012).

Finally, the engagement rates in YouTube are mostly connected with LAs or GGBs that are active in the realm of culture (e.g. festivals). This is mainly attributed to the strong audiovisual element of cultural activities.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

As explained, based on a sampled content analysis of the last 15-20 posts with direct tourism promotion content and, of course, depending on the availability of the administrators during the time of analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 3 good performers. The discussion was open but was directed by the interviewer on a pre-arranged set of questions that focused on five broad thematic. The results of these interviews are analyzed below.

Points Raised at the Interviews

As far as user philosophy, one could note that all organizations agree that the main scope of social networks should be tourism promotion, in terms of providing the necessary information to prospective tourists. Special reference was made by some organizations to the dimension of "inspiration", namely the fact that social networks could cultivate the urge to users for visiting a given destination. In this context, we could highlight the case of GNTO and the use of the hashtag *#greekphotos* during 2012 that applied an iconocentric strategy of beautiful Greek landscapes, in order to overturn the heavy and negative environment that prevailed due to economic depression. As a result, the hashtag *#greekphotos* proved more successful, outnumbering that of *#greekcrisis* in Google+ (Cano, 2012).

GNTO (via Visit Greece) seems to afford a more integrated philosophy concerning the way that social networks should apply to tourism promotion. This should be somehow expected as the *e*-modernization of GNTO had been initiated back in 2011, targeting at a multifaceted tourism promotion mix that included not only culture and architecture, but also customs, gastronomy and elements of Greek everyday life. During the interview, the administrators of GNTO's social networks accounts underlined that the organization soon discovered that the promotional mix should also change, focusing more on boosting prospective tourists' engagement. In this way, "customers" could not only get informed regarding Greek destinations, but also co-tailor the tourism product.

The MoK holds a more conservative user philosophy as it aims mainly at informing users about local events and tourism sites. Hence, the administration of social networks accounts is driven mainly by the decisions of local officials and is less co-shaped by online users and citizens. The same holds pretty much for the case of ADDMA, as the administrators underlined the lack of connection between target and result. Nevertheless, they added that this should be somehow anticipated as the agency was in a transitional process in terms of social media strategy.

On the strategic level, social networks are generally used for increasing market penetration of the Greek tourism product, but also for eminently communicative purposes compatible with the mission of each Agency. Especially in the case of GNTO, social networks were reported as means to implement the overall strategic and operational plan of the organization. On the other hand, the case of the ADDMA may not portray an explicit connection between social networks and the strategic and operational plan, but *"This is Athens"* platform now works with a philosophy of adopting a more B2C orientation. Finally, the MoK management of social networks is compatible with the business plan of the Municipality.

In terms of typical social media accounts' management, it was encouraging that decisions related to posts' content and timing of upload was a matter of the administrators' discretion, in all organizations interviewed. In short, a post does not undergo through various stages and higher authority to get approval, but is a matter of every administrator's responsibility. The same applies to the replies to personal messages and comments. Nevertheless, the fact that the post itself is under the responsibility of the social network administrator does not mean that general programming or collective co-processes at group level are absent. More specifically, GNTO holds a weekly program of general

posts on Facebook. Relevant programming is scarce in ADDMA, but the content of uploaded posts is a result of frequent brainstorming sessions. For the case of MoK the content of the uploaded posts lies at the discretion of the administrator of the account, except for cases of important, sensitive and political matters, thus the approval of the Mayor is necessary.

The social networks management teams are usually comprised of few members. For example GNTO employs four (4) persons, MoK employs five (5) persons, while ADDMA employs only two (2). In all three cases, social networks are managed in-house.

As far as activities for boosting followership and users' engagement, GNTO holds the most integrated ones, as it employs special programs of analytics (i.e. Hootsuite). At the same time, aiming at the promotion of social networks accounts, GNTO has reached an agreement/cooperation with Facebook and holds specific promotional packages to targeted audiences. Similar discussions have not yet been made with Twitter, but some initial discussions have been made with Instagram. For the rest organizations, analyzing the performance of their social networks accounts is handled in a more non-typical way, not employing advanced analytics programs.

As for the tourist promotion issues and identifying the target audience, things are less clear in the particular economic situation that the country faces. Domestic tourism has become a negligible part of tourism promotion and all efforts seem to aim at foreign tourism. Interviews with GNTO administrators have shown that they aim mainly at the problem of tourism seasonality, trying to expand seasonality to a more uniform distribution of tourist arrivals.

For the scope of our case study and based on the periods of travelling described by Milano et al. (2011), we asked the social networks administrators whether their philosophy is based solely on attracting new clients or serves also to inform and assist travelers during or after their stay. It became apparent that all organizations aimed at being rather active at assisting travelers during their stay. For example, GNTO administrators explained us that this was really intense during the capital controls period during mid-2015. Furthermore, they added that tourism promotion targets also at nurturing the need of travelers to visit back Greece, boosting thus the experiential dimension of their journey. The element of continuity in the promotion of the tourism product is rather critical for social networks, in comparison with more conventional forms of advertising and promotion. More specifically, the potential "customer" does not constraint his/her information only in TV, radio or outdoor advertising, but could be continuously get informed on a 24/7 basis via official social networks accounts. Furthermore, the message could be written, optical (image) or even audiovisual (video). A critical, though, element that differentiates social networks from conventional advertising in this context is the element of management. More specifically, while promotional management of a conventional advertising campaign may require X time before the launching of the commercial or advertising ad, social media handling requires intense management of accounts and the emerging engagement with users at a permanent basis. Therefore, the team that manages these accounts should comprise of specialized members that are familiar with engaging users and employing advanced marketing and communication techniques.

Furthermore, during the qualitative stage of our study and the relevant interviews, we understood that the funds for commercial reasons are critically cut during the last decade. It should be noted here that the budgetary cuts were conducted not only for economic reasons, but also for strategic ones. In this context, the expenditure of GNTO for online promotion has reached almost half of the advertizing budget in 2014 (GNTO, 2013). The reasoning behind this shift is largely based on the economic efficiency of online tourism promotion, as potential "customers" spend already a large portion of their everyday time at internet and social media, making thus the promotional message more easily and widely accessible to them. Furthermore, the interactive attribute of Web 2.0 and social media expands tourism promotion not only at the pre-arrival stage, but also at during- or after-stay period (Milano et al., 2011). Thus, perhaps the most critical thing that this new era of online communication brings is that of users and administrators engagement.

The transition to the digital age in general (and social networks in particular) can solve and another big problem that existed in the traditional tourism promotion schema. More specifically, electronic platforms provide direct ways to measure advertising investment made by the Agency, as they provide a one-to-one interpretation of the return on money invested, if compared with made bookings (Hvass and Munar, 2012). In the traditional schema of tourism promotion, the Agency could not be sure whether the volume of bookings resulted from the tourism campaign *per se* or due to random reasons. This detail was noted especially during the discussions with officials from GNTO, underlining thus another strategic dimension for the transition to online marketing.

HOW TO MANAGE SOCIAL NETWORK ACCOUNTS:
A NORMATIVE TOOLKIT PROPOSAL

It is extremely difficult to propose a single and catholic way of managing all types of social networks. The reason is rather simple: all social networks are not operating in the same way, nor addressing to the same audiences. A brief engagement with key social networks will make someone understand the critical differences between them. For example, Facebook holds a rather mass culture, reaching a very wide audience, which however has no particular mood of deep political analysis, but is oriented more towards an interaction between acquaintances and friends. On the other hand, Twitter holds a far more 'politicized' complexion. It is no coincidence that major official institutional and political leaders operate accounts on Twitter. One could argue that Twitter has received dimensions of a *sui generis* electronic diplomacy, as Institutions and public figures decide to make public interventions through the 140 characters offered by the platform. This is also reflected in the annual Twiplomacy report[14], which analyzes annual international political trends. To understand the extent of political influence exercised via Twitter, it is of note that political leaders around the world create specific tags (hashtags), in an effort to promote issues of special interest, affecting thereby the national or even international political agenda. Perhaps one of the most successful labels in recent years that led to a massive anti-terrorist campaign was that of #jesuischarlie, created after the terrorist attack at the offices of the newspaper Charlie Hebdo. To grasp the magnitude of success and influence brought - in communicative terms - it worth's noting that between January 7, 2015 and January 9, 2015 5 million tweets were uploaded with this hashtag (D'Amato, 2015). Therefore, each social network holds some inherent characteristics. However, collective digital media hold also a set of common attributes that have to do mainly with that of interaction and engagement, i.e. the method, frequency, medium and quality of the communication between administrators and users.

Based, on the findings of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation, as well as the necessary literature review, this paper makes an attempt to propose a basic social networks management toolkit for tourism-related Public Entities. While this task is done in the literature by many scientists on an intuitive or empirical basis (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Youmans et al., 2012; Mergel & Bretschneider, 2013), this paper has tried to draw some normative implications based both on a specific case study that evaluated user engagement in a quantitative manner and on interviews regarding account management in qualitative way. While indeed the normative proposals of the following toolkit hold mainly for the tourism sector, one could argue that some aspects could also hold for social networks covering other public policy sectors, calibrated for the requisite specificities, but this could a matter of future research.

Axis 1: Choice of the Proper Social Network

Choosing the right social network, in order to address to the prospective audience, is a critical element of success. The choice should depend primarily on the organization's strategic planning and mission. For example, an organization that is mainly interested in facilitating communication with users could choose Facebook or Twitter. Moreover, if you simply want to provide information to the public, not

aiming for example at engagement, then perhaps a Blog would be enough. In any case, the organization should be clear in what it wants to achieve, otherwise it may face the danger of maintaining a large set of social media, employing thus a big amount of resources (human, material or monetary) without having any special performance in terms of interaction with citizens or other target audience. Towards this direction, it would be wise to merge the management of social networks with the Strategic and Operational Plan of the organization. In this context, a particularly good practice in the Greek public sector was the case of GNTO and Visit Greece.

Axis 2: Vitality

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of success in social networks management is that of continuous presence, namely vitality of the social networks accounts. This is a key element of "viral marketing", i.e. the ability of a transmitter not only to send the message, but also to hold the necessary mechanisms that will continuously enhance it to the market (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Social networks are predominantly forms of such mechanisms, which transmit and amplify signals. An item that was realized from all interviews conducted for the case of best practices, during the qualitative research stage, was that the involvement of a public official in social networks could not be constrained in the typical eight (8) working-hours period. Social networks require management on a 24/7 basis, which necessitates a good organization and communication between the members of the management team.

Axis 3: Openness

Social networks are built on the fundamental principle of openness. Although they offer nearly all possibilities to limit certain users, if the administrator wishes so, the basic principle is that an account must be open to the public. Especially in the case of Public Entities that element is of crucial importance. In this rationale, organizations should avoid personal accounts (accounts) or groups (groups) on Facebook, as they portray an element of closure. Similarly on Twitter, it would be prohibitive for a Public Entity to operate locked accounts that requires a license to become a follower. The purpose of a public institutional account should be the unobstructed provision of information and the enhancement of communication with the public or anyone else interested, not to create obstacles to users' engagement.

Axis 4: Mix of Social Networks

As explained above, each social network holds its own peculiarities; therefore if the mission of our organization is multidimensional, then it may be strategically efficient to develop a mix of social media. In this way the organization can address at different audiences, opening the spectrum of its appeal. A typical example is that of GNTO, who operates accounts in almost all popular social networks. Here, however, we must draw the attention to an important detail. Each of the analyzed axes does not operate independently from the others, but instead each requires the existence of the others. Therefore, while operating a large social media mix may be desirable, we must be sure that we will have the sufficient staff to serve the sustainability of Axis 2, namely that of each account's vitality.

Axis 5: Group Staffing and Creativity

The management of social networks should follow an organized and systemized process. The administrators of a GGBs' or LAs' social network account should not be comprised of typical civil servants, who handle folders and blindly follow established regulations. Basically, posts on social networks are not official documents and should be treated as such. In this study we identified many Entities (mainly with low scores) that treated social networks as nodes to replicate their administrative documents, press releases and announcements. Under this logic and practice, these organizations systematically violate Axis 1. To put it more eloquently, social media are not transparency program initiatives[15]!

In general, the content of social media accounts should be updated on a daily basis, be easily apprehended by the user, be clever and possess some punch line elements. In case you need to convey a more serious and urgent message, then it should be clear, succinct and comprehensible.

The aforementioned characteristics necessitate employees that possess some skills beyond that of the typical public official. First, they should be people who know how to operate at an optimal degree social networks and are familiar with the technical characteristics of collective digital communication (labels-hashtags; HTML language in the case of Blogging, etc.), as well as to speak and write in English fluently. Second, they should be adequately familiar with the organization's thematic area and field of action. For example, GNTO's administrators are required to be familiar with the electronic tourism industry and the organization's competitors in social networks. Furthermore, they should be capable to conduct requisite stakeholders' analyses and to develop potential coalitions with organizations that are active in similar or complementary activities. Third, a social media administrator should have a continuous presence, which usually exceeds the typical working hours. We underline once more that ensuring Axis 2 (vitality) is critical for the success of the social media account, so as to achieve high user engagement.

The necessity of the aforementioned characteristics, combined with the lack of adequately trained civil servants, results in the out-sourcing of social networks accounts management to external partners in the private sector (see for example the cases of social networks of the Prefectures of Attica or Crete). Alternatively, the selection of hiring contracted administrators employed under private law could be the case (see for example the case of ADDMA). In this vein, worth mentioning is the case of GNTO, whose social media administrators are permanent civil servants (including two graduates of the National School of Public Administration and Local Government).

Axis 6: Enhanced Users' Engagement

The cornerstone of social networks, as well as the major change that Web 2.0 brought, is the ability of the user to interact with the site's content. This is a great electronic revolution, without which a social network would be completely useless. During this study we found several "alive" organizations in respect to the number of uploaded posts, but in practice "dead" in terms of users' engagement or followership. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) develop a strategy that aims to increase sociability of an organization's social networks account based on five (5) recommendations:

1. **"Be active":** Essentially to serve always the axis of vitality, as described above. The whole secret of social media, as well as their recipe for success, can be traced at interaction, communication, commenting, reposting and sharing of its material;
2. **"Be interesting":** As mentioned above no social media user is interested in reading merely a press release. Messages and discourse in social networks needs to pull attention, make you consider "why did I not think of that" or "what a wonderful place to visit" and finally decide to share the post with your followers;
3. **"Be humble":** The social networks account administrator, while possessing a multi-faceted apparatus and knowledge, should manifest sincere interest in the opinion of other users, putting them in the center of the game of interaction. Unlike the average civil servant, who knows what the law or regulation foresees and has to communicate it to citizens, the administrator of an organization's official social networks account should heed to the opinions of users and adapt the content of the account according to their needs;
4. **"Be unprofessional":** In the sense that the style of uploaded posts should possess some degree of everyday informality, so that the reader/follower/user can identify with. Most of the times, it is critical for the user to feel that the post or text read could have been written by him/her, creating in this way a common mental perception and experience. Making a user/follower to identify with what you write/upload is perhaps one of the greatest successes that a social network account

could achieve. Kietzmann et al. (2010) describe this as an effort to make your account and its content "*quasi-private*";

5. **"Be honest":** Being consistent with your organization's scope and orientation and do not try to achieve something beyond your institutional scope. This feature is especially applicable to other types of social media, such as Wikipedia.

Especially for the tourism industry, the most important things are to ensure the active participation of users and to build loyalty between the organization and the user in all phases of the journey (Blackwell et al., 2005). This means that the administrator of a social network account should not be constrained only at feeding the timeline with new posts, but also at responding to comments and users' personal messages, providing them with continuous support.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a case study focused on tourism-related GGBs, LAs and CAOs and tries to evaluate their performance in online social networks. In order to do so, we started from a population of 1.506 Public Entities and ended in a core sample of 228 entities that satisfied a strong liveness criterion.

In contrast with other similar studies that have focused only on metrics for Facebook, this paper expands on the literature of social media metrics/evaluation and proposes a set of metrics for two more popular social media platforms, namely Twitter and YouTube. Especially the metrics analyzed for Twitter could be really useful for the evaluation of user engagement with official accounts of other policy spaces, like for example politicians. A novelty of our proposed set of metrics is that, in contrast with Papaloi et al. (2012) and Bonson & Ratkai (2013), it is not limited to examining only aspects of engagement, but considers also the element of online followership, namely the ability of an account to attract more followers, fans or subscribers.

The study was a part of a wider project at the Greek National Centre of Public Administration and Local Governance that aimed at evaluating the presence of Greek public entities in online social digital media. The selection of the tourism policy sector was made due to its critical significance for the Greek economy. Our research was conducted in various stages, with the initial one being to chart the presence of tourism-related Public Entities in various social networks. One of the main conclusions of the first charting stage of the study is that, in the case of Greek tourism-related public entities, most GGBs and LAs prefer Facebook as a first choice among various social media. This is compatible with the fact that Facebook is indeed the most popular social network in Greece and worldwide[16], providing thus Public Entities with a broad audience to address. LAs are also quite active in terms of social networking, probably due to the fact that they address to an audience more delimited by common geography, socio-cultural profile and common concerns about local issues.

During the next research stage we moved at focusing our research sample on the three most popular social networks (Twitter, Facebook and YouTube), as well as on those accounts that satisfied a criterion of Hard Liveness on these networks, so as to have meaningful results on a sample that would be genuinely active in terms of uploaded web-content. In terms of liveness, Facebook accounts seem to be more active. Twitter accounts are considerably active, even though in a smaller scale than those in Facebook. The problems of preparing and managing audiovisual material seem to affect largely the activity of YouTube accounts, with almost one out of two accounts falling under the soft liveness or zombie inertia criteria.

The third research stage involved the calculation of certain online user engagement and online followership metrics and the extraction of a list of best performers, based on a relative benchmarking scoring scheme. In terms of online user engagement and online followership, the findings of the study replicate insights that are often expressed in the literature, like for example that personal accounts seem to boost the metrics of both online user engagement and online followership, as users seem to identify themselves more easily with an eponymous public figure. Furthermore, LAs seem to present higher

engagement rates than GGBs. This could be partially attributed to the fact that municipalities and local governments (even in cases of individual officers) target at a more limited geographical audience that can be easily traced. Furthermore, people are more interested in participating and getting informed of issues that have to do with local communities, whose effects are experienced more directly. A useful finding is that high-ranking entities tend to possess accounts in all three popular social media, while entities with a constrained representation in social media tend to perform less efficiently. For those entities that operate a YouTube account, high engagement rates are mostly connected with LAs or GGBs that are active in the realm of culture (e.g. festivals). This could be mainly attributed to the strong audiovisual element of cultural activities.

Nevertheless, this paper does not constrain its analysis at a quantitative level. For the case of 3 good performers and depending of their given availability, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the responsible administrators of their social media accounts. Our discussion focused on the way that they manage the accounts, the daily administrative routines that they follow, their strategic orientation, the way that they view social media, their promotional strategies, as well as how they apprehend modern tourism policy. Through the interviews stage, we found out that social media are generally used for increasing market penetration and addressing to existing and potential customers. In contrast with typical administrative processes followed for the circulation and publication of official documents, all interviewees admitted that they follow more lax procedures in social media management.

Based on the findings of the quantitative analysis, as well as the insights that the public officials shared with us at the interviews stage, we tried to develop a normative toolkit that tourism-related public organizations could have in mind when managing their social media. The toolkit was analyzed in six (6) axes: choice of the proper social network, vitality, openness, mix of social networks, group Staffing and Creativity and enhanced users' engagement. While the proposals of the toolkit are connected mainly with social media activated in the tourism promotion sector, the general normative principles could hold as well for the management of social media in other public spaces (i.e. politics).

The current study is by no means exhaustive. First of all, it has focused on specific public policy space. Future research that would evaluate user engagement with the proposed metrics in other public policy spaces (i.e. politics, economic governance, etc.) would be highly beneficial, in our effort to understand the dynamics that force agents' engagement in social media. Furthermore, similar sorts of metrics should be developed for other popular social networks, like for example Instagram.

An interesting aspect to examine in future research would also be the impact evaluation of the media types and contents of uploaded posts, tweets and video uploads in terms of user engagement. Future work, for instance, could hypothesize on eventual dependencies of levels of online user engagement on the type of media uploaded (i.e. text, photos, videos, links), engage in content analysis of posts, as well as in discourse analysis of textual posts/tweets and comments.

Especially regarding our understanding on the management level, one serious deficiency of the current study was that no semi-structured interviews were carried out with bad performers. Given insights from their management practices, we could provide a more integrated comparative analysis on good management practices.

Finally, given that more studies will be carried out for social media performance in other policy spaces, the normative toolkit could be updated and reinforced with more solid propositions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] In those we included all Municipalities (LAs) of Regional Units, as well as all Prefectures/Regions introduced by the Kallikratis Administrative Reform on January 1, 2011 (Act No. 3852/2010 of 8 June 2010 – Available at: http://www.kedke.gr/uploads2010/N38522010_KALLIKRATIS_FEKA87_07062010.pdf [in Greek]).

[2] Abbreviation for online user Engagement on Facebook(E.F.)

[3] Abbreviation for online user Engagement on Twitter (E.T.)

[4] Abbreviation for online user Engagement on YouTube (E.Y.)

[5] For the cases of Facebook and YouTube, it was practically difficult/unreliable to calculate the total number of posts or uploads made during the entire lifespan of the account. For this reason, the Activity metric (ACV) was not calculated for these platforms.

[6] For reasons of sample homogeneity, we excluded from our further analysis Facebook groups and non-public personal accounts.

[7] The abbreviation stands for Legal Form. Code 1 stands for LEUPLs, Code 2 for LAs, Code 3 for CAOs and Code 4 for Public Entities.

[8] Normalized metric for online user Engagement on Twitter.

[9] Normalized metric for online Followership on Twitter.

[10] Normalized metric for online user Engagement on Facebook.

[11] Normalized metric for online Followership on Facebook.

[12] Normalized metric for online user Engagement on YouTube.

[13] Normalized metric for online Followership on YouTube.

[14] http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2015/

[15] See the relevant initiative at https://diavgeia.gov.gr/en

[16] Facebook dominated Nielsen List of 2015's Most Popular Apps (see http://goo.gl/esY1Qk) and ranked no.1 at the eBizMBA rank (see http://goo.gl/nPHvvn).