



Can Social Media be a Tool for Participatory Governance in Slovak Municipalities?

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Abstract

This paper presents the first findings of research that focused on the use of social media by Slovak regional towns. Social media, namely Facebook, are considered a powerful tool for various public administration activities that do not relate only to informing citizens, but also having them participate in decision-making and municipality governance. The paper points out the ways of social media usage by selected municipalities. The research was carried out in the months of February and March 2018 using a special tool for analyzing Facebook pages called Quintly and a questionnaire survey among the employees of the municipalities. The results indicate that municipalities use Facebook mainly for ex-ante informing and for asking citizens to vote in various competitions that can help the local government to gain funding for some public services. Calling for participation in decision-making is very limited. The paper also shows a comparative perspective that can be used by municipalities but also by other local or even national governments to work further with Facebook and adopt a social media use strategy.

Key words:

participatory governance, e-participation, social networks, social media

1. Introduction

Besides the citizen participation tools set out in the legislation, there are other methods which citizens use in their public affairs. Likewise, self-governments

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seeking to be as open as possible introduce different elements that make it possible for the public to engage in public decision-making beyond the legally defined instruments. Such tools include, for example, public debates, opinion surveys, city webpages, the regular publication of city newspapers or newsletters, city radio and television, public speaking hours, etc. The methods and concepts of participation that are currently becoming increasingly prominent are participatory budgeting, participatory planning, co-creation and co-operation, social networking, Internet forums, automatic news delivery to email addresses or texting, applications used to report incentives and suggestions for improving the functioning of self-government and various others (Vitálišová et al. 2017; Pirošík 2005; Špaček 2017).

Implementing modern information technology is becoming part of reform strategies (Bouckaert et al. 2011) and innovation processes (Kozun-Cieslak 2016). Several scholars (La Porte et al. 2000; Drúke 2007; La Porte et al. 2002) have pointed out the potential contribution of the Internet to enhance the interactivity, transparency, and openness of public sector entities and to promote new forms of accountability and building of citizens' trust in governments. Literature emphasizes the potential to use social media technologies to enhance the legitimacy and responsiveness of government organizations (Sinkiene and Bryer 2016). Social media presence and activity is no longer a question of choice for most governments as these new platforms empower individuals and non-traditional interest groups. Politicians were first to react to these changes by using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs to rally support. Government institutions are slowly catching up and are increasingly experimenting with social media (Mickoleit 2014). The importance of social media use is beyond doubt, yet only little attention is paid to the use of social media in e-participation, especially in countries of Central and East Europe, like Slovakia, where the use of the Internet and social media is still only on the rise. According to Eurostat data, the percentage of individuals between the ages of 16 and 74 using Internet for social media participation in the Slovak Republic rises annually. In 2014, it was 50 %, the following year the share rose to 54 % and in 2016 57 % of the population between 16 and 74 used the Internet to participate in social media (Eurostat 2017). Therefore, we chose to analyze Slovak municipalities and the ways in which they interact with citizens by using social media. To fulfil this intention, the objective was set to analyze social media use in Slovak regional municipalities in order to answer the research question whether social media can be a tool for participatory governance in Slovak municipalities. We employ methods of structured interviews, manual data collection from Facebook pages of regional municipalities and Quintly analysis. These methods are described in more detail in the goal and methods section, which is preceded by an introduction and a literature review. After the methodology, the next section is findings, followed by a discussion and the paper's main results are summarized in the conclusion.

2. Literature review

E-participation requires citizens to have some digital skills; on the other hand, the real functioning of e-participation is also conditioned by the active participation of individual municipalities. It is primarily about providing a technical platform for e-participation, disseminating information on this possibility, regularly updating and making information available on electronic portals, responding to citizens' prompts and rapid feedback from local government (Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2012). When using e-participation, there is a direct interconnection of individual stakeholders, i.e. the transition from one-way sharing of information and data with citizens to more interactive engagement between citizens and self-government. The empirical studies on e-participation show different forms of electronic participatory methods and concepts such as social networks, blogs, forums, mobile applications, webcast, electronic opinion polls, electronic petitions, electronic commenting procedure, electronic consultations, warning services, interactive games and scenarios (Vitálišová et al. 2017; Džatková 2015 Makýšová and Vaceková 2017).

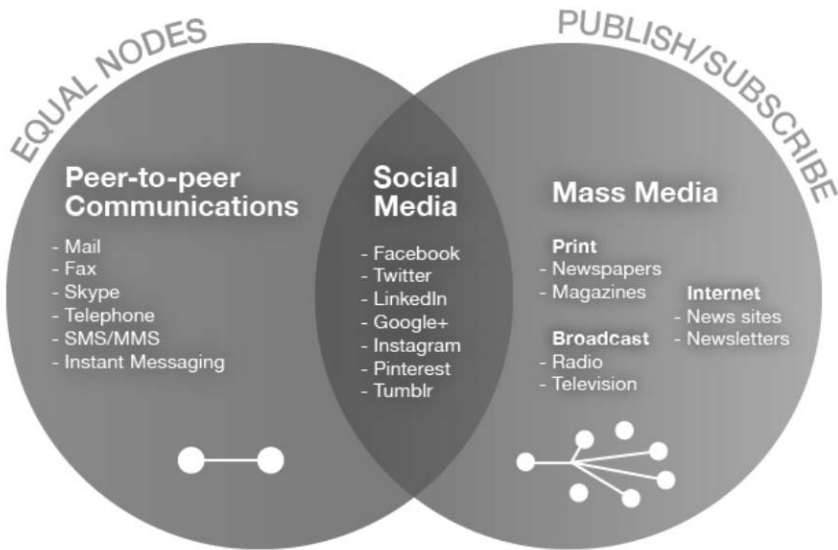
It is important to distinguish between social networks and social media. Boyd and Ellison (2007) call Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Flickr, etc. by the term "social network sites", which means these are the sites to create social networks. Social networking sites are web-based tools that allow users to create a profile and create a network attached to that profile as well as interact with others using this application (Xenos et al. 2014). Other authors (e.g. Leskovec et al. 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Veerasamy 2013) are more specific and state that prior to 2010, "social network" was more widely used than "social media", but there is a meaningful, qualitative difference between the two terms. Social networking sites disrupted traditional media. Social media giants like Facebook and Twitter did not originally intend to become the way most people look for news: they were just trying to bring people together. Becoming "media" was something they grew into, rather than set out to be. To simplify, social media are the intersection of communication and publishing, as can be seen in Figure 1.

The ability to publish information is not a core function of a social network, but it is fundamental to social media.

In the paper, we focus on the use of social media, which Bonsón et al. (2012) define as new platforms for exchanging personal and professional information. In light of the previous explanation between a social network and social media, we add that social media also serve for publishing news on events and issues, so they have shifted from exchanging personal and professional information to the ability to disseminate information at large (Social Media = Social Networks + Publishing).

The use of social media to make contact with citizens is currently a common practice in some eGovernment portals. Citizens have the opportunity to express their viewpoints and opinions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on topical issues (San-

Figure 1
Social media is communications + publishing



Source: Veerasamy 2013

doval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2012. Urs (2017) attaches importance to social media, especially Facebook, in public affairs not only in promoting citizen engagement and better connection between citizens and representatives of local governments, but also the fact that Facebook can be used as a “weapon in the electoral arsenal” by officials to directly inform and issue reports. Furthermore, public administrations can take advantage of the heyday of this new participative culture that is developing in many citizens in order to draw their attention toward municipal management, engage them in local public decision-making, and improve government-to-citizen relationships, i.e. social media might help in establishing e-participation (Bonsón et al. 2012). Bryer and Zavattaro (2014) describe social media as a tool for enhancing government transparency, public participation, and intergovernmental and cross-sectoral collaboration.

2.1 Social media in developed countries

Bonsón et al. (2012) analyzed the use of Web 2.0 and social media tools in EU local governments (Table 1) in order to determine whether local governments are using these technologies to increase transparency and e-participation and opening a real corporate dialog. They identified which factors promote the level of development of these tools at the local level. For this purpose, they analyzed the websites of 75 EU

cities and the presence of these cities in social media platforms. The cities analyzed were the largest cities from fifteen EU countries (EU-15), which represent more than 85% of the EU population.

Table 1
Seventy-five EU-15 local governments in the social media in 2012

Social media	Social media metrics	Mean
Twitter	Councils with an official Twitter account	24 (32.0%)
	Average number of Twitter followers	803
	Average number of Twitter tweets	607
	Average number of Twitter lists	45
	Activity on the official Twitter account	7
	Average number of Twitter conversations	576
Facebook	Average number of Facebook profiles	130
	Councils with an official Facebook profile	12 (16.0%)
	Average number of members of the official Facebook group	342
	Average number of Facebook profiles	2
	Councils with an official Facebook profile	13 (17.3%)
	Average number of fans of the official Facebook profile	1,412
	Activity on the official Facebook profile	7
LinkedIn	Average number of LinkedIn groups	1
	Councils with an official LinkedIn group	9 (12.0%)
	Average number of members of the official LinkedIn group	159
YouTube	Councils with an official YouTube channel	22 (29.3%)
	Average number of subscribers to the official YouTube channel	30
	Average number of YouTube conversations	1,610
Google blogs	Google indexed blogs	111,717

Source: Bonsón et al. 2012

Research has shown that most local governments are using Web 2.0 and social media tools to enhance transparency, but in general the concept of corporate dialog and the use of Web 2.0 to promote e-participation are still in their infancy at the local level.

Gao and Lee (2017) focused their research on social media in Canadian small local governments (a population less than 25,000 is classified as a small local government in Canada). Drawing from e-government and social media literature, they offered hypotheses by focusing on the relationship between e-government service

characteristics and the adoption of Facebook and Twitter in the context of small local government. Using original survey and census data of local governments in Nebraska, they discovered that transaction services are associated with the adoption of Facebook, while information services are related to the adoption of Twitter. It also found that Facebook and Twitter have been adopted mainly as an additional broadcasting channel to get the messages out. Their study demonstrated that Facebook and Twitter can contribute to different purposes of small local governments: Facebook is likely to be used as a complementary means of providing e-government transaction services, while Twitter tends to supplement online information services. From the analysis of the daily and weekly use of social media, the authors concluded that Facebook is used by 65 % of governments to provide government information, 50 % of governments use Facebook to invite citizens' input and 46 % of governments respond to the input on Facebook. This provides support to the previous view that social media adoption is another step in e-government evolution, and it confirms small local governments' efforts toward more interactive use of social media tools, in particular, Facebook.

Boulianne (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 studies assessing the relationship between social media use and participation in civic and political life. Results of a meta-analysis of research on social media use and participation demonstrate a positive relationship between social media use and participation. The author took 170 effects of social media use on citizens' participation in civic and political life researched in those 36 studies and coded the social media variables into general use, online news or political information, social network building and other measurement approach. Based on the metadata, the relationship between social media use and participation is clearly positive, but questions remain about whether the relationship is statistically significant. Studies using panel data were less likely to report positive and statistically significant coefficients between social media use and participation, compared to cross-sectional surveys. The metadata also suggested that social media use has minimal impact on participation in election campaigns.

Linders (2012) examines the evolution of citizen coproduction in the age of social media, web 2.0 interactivity, and ubiquitous connectivity and discusses the potential implications for public administration and the possible emergence of a new social contract that empowers the public to play a far more active role in the functioning of their government.

2.2 Social media in post-communist countries

The use of social media by government in post-communist countries is still in its beginnings, and the research on this issue is rather scarce. Authors mostly deal with social media adoption in employee recruitment and selection (El Ouiridi et al. 2016) or use of marketing technology (web analytics, social media, customer analytics, digital campaigns and mobile applications) in companies (Jayaram et

al. 2015), i.e. the research is focused on the private sector, not on the public sector, where the use of social media is new phenomena. Among the few studies, we mention the following two:

Jukic and Merlak (2017) aimed at analyzing the use of Facebook as the most popular social networking site among 112 Slovenian state administration organizations. The results reveal that only a few public organizations have established their Facebook presence, and for most of them considerable room for improvement has been identified in terms of usage of Facebook as a social network with the highest potential of reach and engagement in the number of its users.

Špaček (2017) presented preliminary results of Facebook use in 11 regions in the Czech Republic. The research has shown that Facebook pages were used mainly for ex-post informing. Calls for participation could be found only sporadically. This category particularly represents calls for participating in meetings of political decision-making bodies (regional councils), invitations to participate in elections to regional councils and also in meetings with the Governor of a region. Analysis of ex-post information also indicated that regions do not use Facebook to inform about the proceedings of council meetings.

A research analyzing the usage of social media in Slovak public administration has not yet been conducted. Moreover, as an OECD study (2015) indicates, Slovakia is pursuing a comprehensive reform of public administration, including the digitization of public administration, but a social media use strategy is missing. In general, only a minority of national governments have a dedicated social media use strategy (7 out of 25 respondents) (OECD 2013). Presenting our research at the local level might increase the interest at the national level to develop a strategy for social media use in e-participation.

3. Goal and methods

The goal of this paper is to analyze social media use in Slovak regional municipalities. Based on the goal we formulated a research question (RQ):

RQ: Can social media be a tool for participatory governance in Slovak municipalities?

For a deeper analysis, we have chosen Facebook, because it is the most used social medium worldwide (see literature review) and also in Slovakia by public sector organizations. The cities we selected are the regional cities of the Slovak Republic. These are not only the seats of the self-governing regions, but they are also the largest cities in terms of the Slovak Republic, whether that be population or area, are more innovative in adapting new technology for their duties, and they need to provide information to a larger number of people. Out of 8 regional cities 7 have established their own official Facebook (FB) page.

In these 7 municipalities, the mayors, management and local politicians were approached by an on-line questionnaire survey in January 2018. The respondents were 1 mayor, 30 politicians, 32 heads of various department (mostly marketing, communication, and development or information technologies). The aim of this questionnaire was to find out who contributes to the administration of FB pages and in what ways, i.e. publishing posts, creating content etc., and what type of posts they publish. In the questionnaire, we also asked about the perceived benefits of using FB as a participatory tool.

We analyze all 7 FB pages using the Quintly tool, an online tool used for social media analysis. This tool was chosen based on the methodology used by Špaček (2017) in his previous research on the Czech municipalities. The Quintly tool gathers information and social media data to quickly and easily track a detailed view of the social networking site's activities. Due to the data in the Quintly database, different measured metrics can be used. We have used the free version of Quintly, which allows only time-limited data tracking, so the time span is from 1 February to 16 March 2018. To answer the RQ, we monitored the following indicators, which are possible to extract with Quintly: the number of posts on individual FB pages of regional cities of the Slovak Republic, the types of posts (event, status, photo, etc.), and the number of comments, shares and likes on the posted posts. Manually (i.e. by checking the FB pages of the municipalities during the analyzed period) we gathered data on the number of posts in individual public service areas. We did not limit the research to selected public services, we simply collected all data available and categorized it into public services areas.

The research sample with number of likes for individual FB profiles is in the Table 2.

Using the Quintly tool we can also analyze the Interaction rate as defined by Kmieckowiak (2016) as an indicator that compares the interactions of a given social media profile irrespective of the amount of the followers. The result is a combined index of the sum of likes, shares and comments per own post, standardized by the total amount of own posts and followers. This metric, however, has to be used with some caution. As the sum of interactions divided by the number of own posts is again multiplied by the ratio of followers, a rising number of people following the profile can drag the rate down. This happens when the absolute number of interactions does not rise proportionally to the follower count.

The Interaction rate (IR) can be calculated using the following formula:

$$IR = \frac{\# \text{ of comments} + \# \text{ of likes} + \# \text{ of shares}}{\# \text{ of own posts}} \times \frac{100\%}{\# \text{ of fans}} \quad [1]$$

Table 2

The research sample of regional cities in the Slovak Republic (SR)

Municipality	Size of the municipality in km ²	Number of inhabitants	Annual budget per capita in €	Facebook page of regional cities in the SR	Number of "Likes" as of 16/03/2018
Bratislava	367.58	429,564	859.88	Bratislava – capital city of SR	17,936
Banská Bystrica	103.37	78,484	949.50	Banská Bystrica	9,338
Košice	243.70	239,095	937.01	Visit Kosice	11,982
Nitra	100.45	77,048	805.10	Nitra	3,509
Prešov	70.44	89,138	910.32	Prešov – Official profile	8,204
Trnava	71.50	65,382	954.17	Trnava	19,846
Žilina	80.03	80,978	892.78	Žilina – city with a face	4,466

Source: own

4. Findings

First, we monitor a number of municipalities' own posts that have been published by the regional cities on the Facebook pages during the period under review. On average, there were 95 posts published by the municipalities with 633 shares and 1,958 likes. On average, one post was shared approximately 7 times and had 21 likes. Our monitored period is 43 days, with posts on some pages even appearing during the weekend.

Žilina is the most active in adding its own posts. On average, it publishes 6 own posts a day. In eight cases, Žilina published more than 10 posts per day. The city with the second largest activity of adding its own contributions is Prešov, which publishes on average 2 own posts on its FB profile per day (Appendix). On the other hand, the least publicized own contributions are recorded in the case of Banská Bystrica and Nitra, where the average number of own posts published was 0.83 and 0.90 contributions respectively during the day. The remaining cities post an average of 1 to 2 posts a day on their FB profiles. This is in line with the recommendation to have 2 posts per day if the Facebook page has at least 10,000 fans. For smaller groups it depends whether the FB administrator wants to achieve more engagement per post or more clicks on the page (Patel 2016).

In Table 3, we see the heterogeneity of the areas of the contributions added. As a result of executing the powers that self-governments are equipped with, the contributions that are published differ. All posts on each FB profile, including their own posts and shared posts and events, were included in these statistics. As can be seen in Table 3, the most common posts on the FB profiles of the regional cities in the SR are culture-related, i.e. invitations to theatre performances, museum and gallery exhibitions, exhibitions, social events, markets and many more.

Table 3

Number of contributions in individual public service areas out of 663 posts in February–March 2017

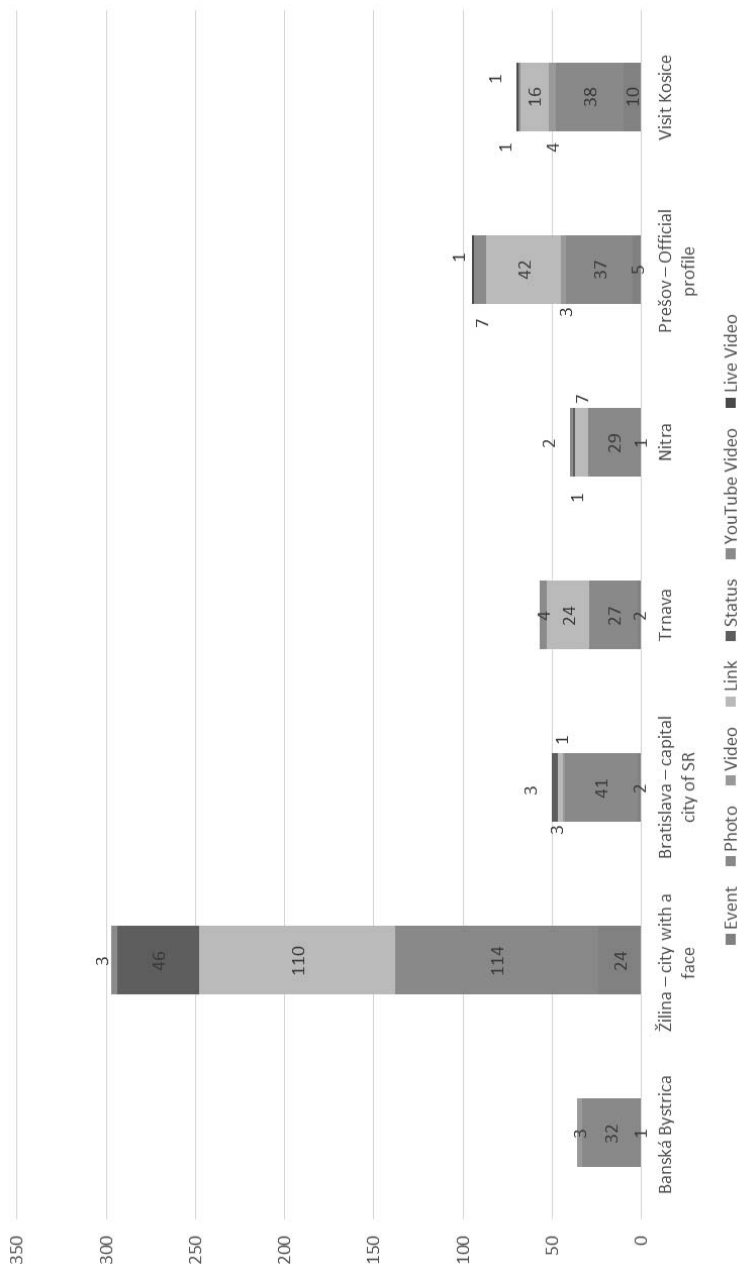
FB page \ Public services area	Culture	Sport	Traffic	Council activities	Schools	Police	Social policy	Public spaces	Call for participation
Bratislava – capital city of SR	7	1	11	2	1	2	4	8	8
Banská Bystrica	10	16	4	1	5	0	1	2	2
Visit Kosice	41	4	9	0	3	1	0	0	7
Nitra	17	6	2	3	2	0	1	3	5
Prešov – Official profile	28	10	13	11	9	0	1	6	16
Trnava	11	6	1	9	3	0	1	1	25
Žilina – city with a face	147	64	7	21	23	9	1	19	12

Source: own research and analysis based on quintly.com

In 2013, the city of Košice was declared the European Capital of Culture. It is perhaps thanks to this award that the Visit Kosice page is dominated by cultural and social events. In self-government, sport ranks second as the area that most frequently provides information on Facebook. During the period under review, there was constantly winter maintenance on the roads, and for this reason, traffic information on road conditions and road work was a frequent topic of contributions.

Under calls for participation, we understand posts where municipalities invited citizens to participate or asked for their input. Here we included the contributions that encouraged citizens to engage in voting in competitions, answering polls, and filling in questionnaires to improve public services in general. The analysis carried out on the regional cities in the Slovak Republic indicates that the attempts to

Figure 2
Types of posts on the Facebook profiles of the regional cities in the SR



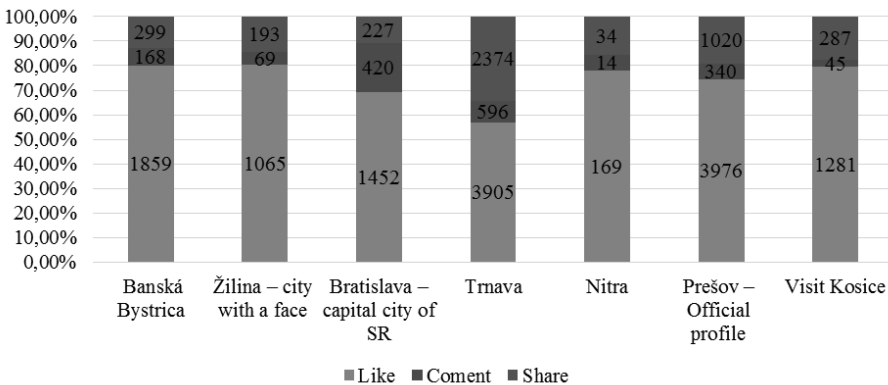
Source: own, based on quintly.com

involve their citizens in local government are not consistent, some cities invite the citizens to meet their elected representatives, others try to get as many people as possible when voting in competitions, where the municipality can obtain funding for projects or subsidies for repairs to cultural monuments. Only on the FB page of Bratislava, the Slovak capital, were citizens invited to participate in planned public debates and debates organized by the local government; furthermore, the city also asked citizens to send in suggestions for personalities to take part in the Mayor’s Award. Most of the published posts were used for ex-ante information, others notified the public about events ex post.

Facebook not only allows one to add one’s own posts, but also to add photos, videos, live streaming, YouTube channel feeds, and more. Using Quintly, we can evaluate which of these options are used by individual profiles on Facebook and to what extent. Based on our questionnaire survey, we found that social networking respondents use Facebook in particular to add photos from their events, write posts, share links, create events, and respond to messages and comments. This corresponds with the results from Quintly analysis (Figure 2), where the most frequented types of posts are photos and links, followed by events. This is also in line with literature (e.g. Johnson 2015; Patel 2016; Ayres 2015), where authors state that the most used type of post should be image (photo or infographics), followed by statuses which should be composed as questions and thus call for interaction.

The last measured metric is the number of comments, shares, and likes on published posts. Citizens use their responses to the published posts to express their opinions and attitudes and also to help disseminate information to other citizens. Figure 3 shows how many comments, shares, and likes are posted on each FB profile during the reporting period.

Figure 3
Number of comments, shares and likes on published posts



Source: own based on quintly.com

Table 4
Interactions distribution on FB pages of selected Slovak Municipalities

Town \ Metric	Various reaction to the posts						Total number of positive reactions	Total number of negative reactions	Comment	Share
	Like	Love	Haha	Wow	Sad	Angry				
Bratislava – capital city of SR	1457	108	101	28	3	16	1694	19	423	229
Banská Bystrica	1893	166	2	11	20	2	2072	22	169	313
Visit Kosice	1287	102	3	11	0	0	1403	0	45	322
Nitra	172	4	1	0	0	0	177	0	19	34
Prešov – Official page	4008	206	33	67	13	10	4314	23	373	1030
Trnava	3910	292	243	7	1	5	4452	6	597	2367
Žilina – city with a face	1067	43	7	2	9	3	1119	12	70	193
Average number of positive reactions per sample	544	Average number of negative reactions per sample				6	Positive to negative reactions ratio		92.87	

Source: own

We see that the most numerous group of responses that can be given to individual posts is the “like” where a citizen expresses their (dis)approval of the post. Facebook enables expressing different reactions, not only like, but several categories including love (strong like), haha (if something is amusing), wow (amazing), and also negative reactions, such as sad and angry. These are shown in more detail in Table 4. The second most common reaction is sharing. Every added content on Facebook can be shared, thereby ensuring the distribution of published information between citizens. The most shared posts are on the facebook sites of Trnava and Prešov – official profile (see Table 4). The least used response to posts is to write comments to the published content. In general, the most liked, shared and commented were the posts on voting in competitions, cultural and sport events and traffic situation.

Table 4 also shows the averages of positive and negative reactions to the municipalities’ posts; the positive reactions prevail: there are almost 93 positive reactions to 1 negative reaction. This can be considered a very good ratio, meaning that citizens agree with the posts of the city and show their approval by positive reactions.

The Interaction rate calculation is summarized in Table 5:

Table 5
Interaction rate for FB pages of selected Slovak Municipalities

Municipality	Interaction rate
Bratislava – capital city of SR	22.51 %
Banská Bystrica	67.32 %
Visit Kosice	18.19 %
Nitra	15.08 %
Prešov – Official page	65.70 %
Trnava	60.77 %
Žilina – city with a face	9.81 %

Source: own

Based on the Interaction rate we can see that although Žilina is the most active municipality with the highest number of own posts, its Interaction rate is the smallest. On the other hand, Banska Bystrica was the municipality with the lowest number of own posts per day, yet the posts engaged more citizens into action (to comment, share or like). This implies that 1) the type of post matters (to verify this, we would need a bigger research sample) and 2) the Facebook pages with approx. 9,000 fans perform the best without the need to use paid advertisements (Guglielmelli 2014).

To point out the benefits of using Facebook as a participatory tool, we asked the local government representatives how they perceive these benefits. We are aware that these findings are strongly subjective based only on the answers of the respondents, yet this is an important information that might call for further research. The most important benefit in using social media as a participatory tool is the possibility for citizens to connect from any device that has Internet access. The representatives of the regional self-governments stated that thanks to the social media citizens are more satisfied, the self-government gains feedback from the citizens and the decision-making processes are more transparent. Among the important benefits, the respondents further consider the elimination of space for the corrupt behavior of the elected bodies, thanks to Facebook the general public is informed and the activity of the self-government is closer to the younger generations. Due to the fact that the individual processes and current events in the self-government are also published via Facebook, self-government is considered open and transparent. Respondents expressed the importance of addressing the interests of smaller groups, which has started thanks to the implementation of social media.

5. Discussion

According to Špaček (2017), self-governments use Facebook in particular for ex-post information, not for feedback from citizens, which is not the case for our monitored cities, as most of the postings reported on upcoming events and encouraged citizens to engage in various activities and events in the respective city. On the other hand, similar findings, as described by Špaček (2017), regarding participation calls have also been demonstrated in our research. This was proven also in research by Gao and Lee (2017), who concluded that Facebook is used by 65% of Canadian local governments to provide government information (ex-post information). Self-governments in Slovakia did not invite citizens to participate in the meetings with self-government representatives (e.g. public debates, hearings, city council meetings, etc.) on their FB profiles. This does not correspond with the findings of Gao and Lee (2017), who stated that 50% of Canadian local governments use Facebook to invite citizens' input.

Klepek (2014) came to the conclusion in his research that Facebook is used without any dependence on the size of the self-government. This conclusion has also been demonstrated in our case, as the cities of Žilina and Prešov are most active in their use of Facebook, although they are not the largest cities among the regional cities in the Slovak Republic.

Along with Prešov, Žilina has the most frequent and most widely published postings on its FB profile. However, unlike the city of Prešov, which has many responses from citizens to contributions, Žilina has a low number of responses in

terms of the number of posts published, as confirmed by the Interaction rate. Žilina should introduce measures to increase feedback.

The least active cities in posting on Facebook are the cities of Nitra and Banská Bystrica. In the case of the FB of Banská Bystrica, it is interesting that in the number of contributions it is one of the least active, but the number of responses to the published postings is bigger than the official FB of Žilina. In spite of the efforts of city representatives from Nitra who have included the city's FB profile in the city budget through set measurable indicators, we see in our analysis that on the one hand they have a low number of posts, and on the other we noted only slight feedback from citizens in the form of likes, comments and shares, as confirmed in the Interaction rate.

Both Košice and Prešov have used live broadcasts on their official FB profiles. With the range of features that Facebook offers, we consider this to be a new trend in our context. We can only recommend for the other self-governments to incorporate this kind of post in their published contributions, as this can motivate citizens to participate actively in the broadcasted event and activities in the future.

Regarding the benefits perceived by the regional municipalities' representatives, these mostly correspond with the results in international studies (e.g. Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2012; Bonsón et al. 2012; Boulianne 2015; Linders 2012), with the most valued benefits being increased transparency, less opportunity for corruption, better informed citizens and especially a youth that is more familiar with using the social media.

6. Conclusion

It is positive that the Slovak regional cities also use social media (Facebook) for ex-ante information, not only ex-post. On the other hand, the information concerns predominantly invitations to events organized by the self-government or calls for participation in voting in competitions, where self-government can obtain funding for the construction of sports facilities or repairs of cultural monuments. Only one self-government (the capital city of Bratislava) uses social media for calls for participation in planned public debates and discussions organized by the self-government. In this case, we can talk about Facebook as a tool for participatory governance. In general, it can be concluded that the largest Slovak municipalities use social media to involve citizens in the city, but not in public matters and local public decision-making. Therefore, social media use in Slovak municipalities cannot be called a tool for participatory governance, which answers our research question. The self-governments do not use social media to improve government-to-citizen relationships, nor to establish e-participation. However, use of social media by government is still in its beginnings in Slovakia; the future might bring more interaction, and the municipalities might also start using Facebook for obtaining citizen input for

decision-making, feedback on proposals on regional legislation, policy etc. The future research should focus on drivers, barriers and limits of using Facebook for participatory governance in the cities in Slovakia and abroad, map best practices and bring policy recommendations for the cities.

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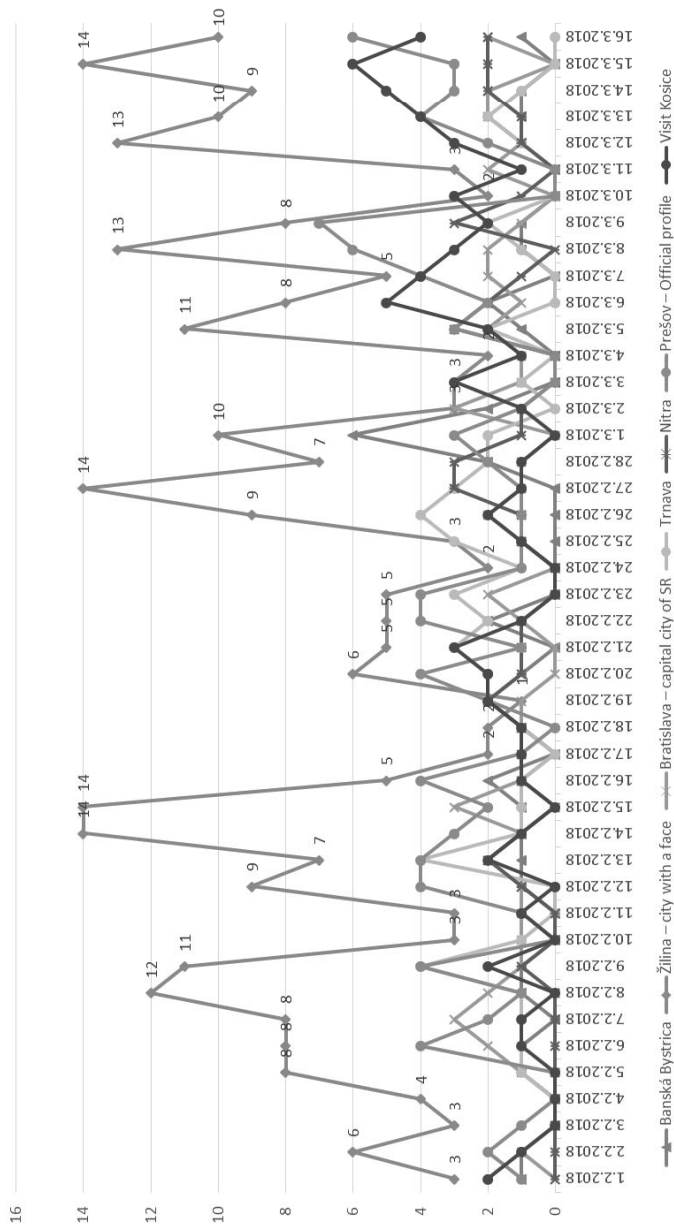
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Appendix

Number of own contributions on FB pages of regional municipalities in the Slovak Republic



Source: own, based on quintly.com