

## Generation Y Students: Using Facebook for Communicating with University Staff and Professors

**Florina PÎNZARU**

College of Management,  
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
6 Povernei St., Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania  
florina.pinzaru@facultateademangement.ro

**Andreea MITAN**

College of Management,  
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
6 Povernei St., Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania  
andreea.mitan@facultateademangement.ro

**Abstract:** *As the ICT develops, universities have to learn how to reshape their communication practices and views on learning environments. Today's students, members of the Y Generation, are digitally natives who wish to, desire and might benefit from the use of Social Network Sites (SNS) communication with their teachers and College administrative staff. The main objective of this paper is to present a manner of using Facebook for faculties in order to better communicate with students. Thus our research is based upon previous examples from academic literature and upon a pilot study conducted online, using a self-administrated questionnaire applied on students from the College of Communication and Public Relations at the National School of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest. Based on their answers, this article proposes some recommendations for using Facebook for university staff and professors.*

**Keywords:** *communication, educational management, digitally native, Facebook, university, Y Generation*

### Introduction

While the communication technologies have evolved during the recent years, our learning habits and ways of interacting with the others have drastically changed. The digital age we live in has made information available at any time and almost any place, so learning has become more of a delocalized, individual experience. Although we learn individually, we are also members of online communities, as digital media encourages user participation and online community building. The youth are the ones most sensitive to this new reality, as

George Barna's study illustrates: „they were born and raised in a global society where consumerism and capitalism are natural conditions and go largely unchallenged. To them, technology is their natural ally, a necessity rather than a luxury, the solution to all imaginable problems” (Barna, 1995, p.46).

Thus, a distinct reality is being built, where everything revolves around technology and people are more and more in touch with each other and the surrounding world, all due to the digital tools of communication. The new social realities developed along with the current generation, leaving behind the X Generation and bringing forward the “Y's” – the people who were born after 1980. Researchers (Huntley, 2006; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010; Hansen & Leuty, 2011) employ several terms in order to define these people: “Net Generation”, “The Millennials”, and “Generation Me” but they are generally called the “Y Generation”, and typically described as being proficient with technology, a characteristic that attracted yet another label: the “Thumb Generation”, “referring to their dexterity with remote controls, computer keyboards, and mobile phones” (Huntley, 2006, p.10). This aspect is also acknowledged by other authors (Weiler, 2004; Cable, 2005; Huntley, 2006; Tapscott, 2009; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010; Zandt, 2010; Dagnaud, 2011; Gansky, 2011), who describe the Y Generation as being extremely attracted by and dependent on technology to find information, to communicate with each other and to organize various aspects of their lives. Furthermore, research points out that “these young people are «tech savvy», «like informality», «learn quickly», and «embrace diversity»” (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010, p.1121). In this regard, Helsper (2010, p.353) compares the X Generation with the Y Generation, stating that the latter grew up “in a completely different ICT environment than their parents, and these generational differences will no doubt influence how they use the Internet”.

By exploring these young adults' way of life, we can remark the emergence of new psychological profiles and of new ways of living. Researchers (Huntley, 2006; Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2011) consider Generation Y members as independent, self-absorbed, optimistic, dynamic, adaptable, having higher levels of cynicism and lower levels of trust in others as compared to previous generations. Unsurprisingly, most of these attributes are seen as a direct result of the technological advancement. Their immersion in the electronic era also has repercussions on other areas of their lives: the exponents of the Y Generation are becoming “more exigent as clients” (Gansky, 2011, p.89), while in order to better recruit and manage them “many companies recognize they should

have a stronger presence on Internet sites such as Facebook” (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010, p.1122). Also, they are inclined towards entrepreneurship, including e-commerce, blogging and online consultancy, which they see as a means to follow their passions and gain money from doing what they enjoy (Mihalcea, Mitan & Vițelar, 2012).

If changes intensify to such extent that they envelop all aspects of the business and social environments, universities should also be concerned with adapting to this new reality. Researchers previously addressed this issue by pointing out an interesting fact: ”students are spending too much time in today’s world of Web 2.0 communicating with friends via Facebook, blogging, and tweeting or in virtual worlds interacting with gamers around the globe playing Halo or the latest Madden” (Buzzard, Crittenden, Crittenden & McCarty, 2011, p.131). Consequently, the academic institutions which they attend are compelled to adapt to their media consumption habits and needs, as long as they wish to create and maintain efficient working relations, both relating to academic and administrative aspects. To support this observation, we add that “these adolescents and young adults have grown up in a period when the Internet usage started to generalize: e-culture is their kingdom and, for this reason, we usually designate them with the term «digital natives»” (Dagnaud, 2011, p.7). For this reason, Generation Y is even “forcing a change in the model of pedagogy, from a teacher-focused approach based on instruction to a student-focused model based on collaboration” (Tapscott, 2009, p.11). Hence, professors need to be aware of students’ characteristics in order to better engage them in the learning process.

## Literature review

### *A. From e-learning to learning 2.0*

The online medium has significantly developed over the time, by gradually acquiring new features. For instance, the 90’s static publishing pattern has been replaced by the current social networking universe. The “push”/”supply” model employed in the traditional Web era has been replaced by the “pull”/”demand” experience in Web 2.0: people refuse to be left out of the content-creation process and they actively participate in reshaping the online space. In this regard, Internet specialists show that we are facing “the emergence of a new form of technology-enhanced learning - Learning 2.0 - which goes beyond providing free access to traditional course materials and educational tools and creates a participatory architecture for supporting communities of learners” (Brown &

Adler, 2008, p.28). Other studies reinforce this idea by indicating that the Internet should be regarded "as a software platform, in which the user controls/creates personal data, information, constantly making them available to others through the use of collaborative instruments" (Holotescu & Naaji, 2007, p.15).

The Web environment is exceptional for facilitating information access. But the new type of e-learning based on Web 2.0 platforms could explore user engagement and not limit itself to passive information delivery. A similar view on the matter is offered by Cheol H. Oh (2003), who states that, when it comes to discussing e-learning, much of the focus is put on technological aspects, rather than the human side of teaching and learning on the Internet. Learning 2.0 should aim at being an interactive and customized social experience. The extensive use of social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace etc.) has spawned questions regarding the possibility of using such platforms in order to provide accessible and efficient learning opportunities. Holotescu & Naaji (2007) have shown that the attributes of such technologies present them in a favourable light: they are cost-effective, flexible, provide easy access to information, accentuate the collaborative aspects, provide strict resource control options, encourage sharing information through various outlets, they permit creating attractive study material (due to a mix of image, sound and text) and users do not need special abilities to use them. The authors we mentioned above point that there could be also a series of educational risks related to Web 2.0 uses, such as technological constraints due to Internet connectivity; problems regarding informational objectivity, novelty and relevance; private life immersion; problems regarding self-discipline and a possible lack of curiosity and motivation from the students' part.

However, compelling evidence that new Internet technologies can support and facilitate the academic process comes from the study of Lowe and Laffey, who report the use of Twitter in education as "a refreshing, useful tool that can add value to the student learning experience by bringing real-world examples into the classroom in a timely fashion" (Lowe & Laffey, 2011, p.188). Web 2.0 technologies can provide learning opportunities, but „should be viewed not as a substitute for other learning technologies but as an easy to use complement to integrate with existing learning technologies" (Lowe & Laffey, 2011, p.190). Consequently, it can be inferred that Facebook - a much more complex social network than Twitter - could also bring pedagogical benefits. Rosen extends this argument by stating that „although these means will never replace formal training, they might be a good tool to augment your learners' experience" (Rosen, 2009, p.132).

### ***B. Could be Facebook use the next step towards learning 2.0?***

Facebook is by definition a social network site (SNS) therefore using it for teaching and learning purposes should also revolve around this concept. In order to emphasize this idea, web consultants Brown and Adler (2008) employ the term “social learning”, based on “the premise that our *understanding* of content is socially constructed through conversations about that content and through grounded interactions, especially with others, around problems or actions. When talking about Web 2.0 use in e-learning, the focus is not so much on *what* we are learning but on *how* we are learning” (Brown & Adler, 2008, p.18). But perhaps the most important issue when talking about e-learning through Facebook is that this process should not be viewed as traditional teaching delivered by innovative technologies. It should function as a holistic approach that takes a step further and adapts teaching methods and course information in order to perfectly fit the new medium of communication.

Facebook is one of the fastest growing SNSs, with the declared objective to “help you connect and share with the people in your life”. Some authors argue this fact by pointing out that “technology and the emergence of social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace have provided an entirely new vehicle for individuals to be connected” (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010, p.1137). Even if Facebook was not created as an e-learning platform, it comprises enough elements that could recommend it for usage in College-related activities. New media specialist Clara Shih underpins the fact that “the online social graph empowers us to be better, more effective, more efficient, and more fulfilled doing what is inherent to our nature—communicating who we are, and transacting and interacting with others across the Web” (Shih, 2009, p.3). In this sense, we can regard social networks – and Facebook in particular – as tools that allow us to engage in complex experiences accessing information, interacting with others through applications, meeting others in forum-like spaces by joining discussion groups, browsing pictures or reading discussion boards. Facebook provides the premises for a better interpersonal relationship than a standard e-learning platform, as “the Facebook experience is quite different than simply accessing an instructor’s university-housed website as students and teachers can easily connect with one another based on their school affiliation through this virtual social network” (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007, p.3). Facebook could therefore be used as an information-delivery tool, as well as an interface between the teacher and the students.

Curiously, previous studies (Hewitt & Forte, 2006, p.2) have shown that a significant number of students (a third of their sample) consider that faculties

should not be present on Facebook because “they have no need to network with students for social purposes”. This topic has been further explained by the studies of Moran, Seaman and Hester (2011), which have shown that Facebook is mostly embraced by students for personal use as opposed to professional use, so they prefer to maintain a distance between personal stuff and institutions. Other studies offer more optimistic views on the possibility of using Facebook and other similar SNS to support classroom work, stating that students are open to this approach to student-institution and student-teacher communication and that they are willing to replace more traditional forms of communication with social networking sites use (Roblyer, McDaniel, Wenn, Hermand & Wittye, 2010). Benefits of Facebook use for educational purposes such as increasing performance in educational micro-communities have already been proven (Boscha, 2009) and recent studies show that over 90% of all faculties already use social media as a teaching tool or recommend it to students for enhancing their professional careers (Moran, Seaman & Hester, 2011).

### **Methodology and sample description**

Empirical observation showed that almost all of our students at the College of Communication and Public Relations at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration in Bucharest had Facebook accounts and logged in daily or few times a day, using the network to stay entertained, share information concerning classes with their peers and sometimes addressing their teachers regarding academic subjects. Their interests in this social network lead us to believe they could benefit from a structured approach of Facebook use by the College teachers and administrative staff.

In order to learn if and how could teachers in particular and College administrative staff in general relate to students using Facebook to enhance their learning experience, we constructed a questionnaire addressing three subjects. First, we wanted to discover the degree in which students employ Facebook for different communication purposes (e.g. as a tool for finding information, promoting themselves, organizing leisure activities and staying in contact with friends). Second, we were interested to learn what were their attitudes regarding Facebook in general and whether they had a positive attitude towards formally employing Facebook in the teaching process and if so, what their expectations in this sense were. Third, we aimed to discover the extent to which students already used Facebook in relation with their academic life, including direct communication with teachers and colleagues. Accordingly,

the research questions we had were the following: To what degree are our students technically savvy/ keen on using technology? What are the reasons why students use Facebook? How do they perceive Facebook? Are they interested in using Facebook to communicate with their teachers and/ or peers? Do they already do that? If so, how do they expect their teachers to use Facebook and what sort of information do they expect to receive? Are the students interested in maintaining contact with the administrative staff through Facebook? If so, how do they expect staff members to communicate with them and what are their topics of interest?

To address these questions, we applied an online survey among current students of the College of Communication and Public Relations from the National University of Political Science and Administrative Studies. The data was collected from a convenience sample of 224 students of both undergraduate and graduate courses by applying online a structured questionnaire, comprising 16 enquiries. Data were collected on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2012.

## Results and discussion

Most of the respondents in our sample (71) were graduate students enrolled in distance learning programs, 61 respondents were graduate students, 65 respondents were undergraduate students, 33 respondents were undergraduate students enrolled in distance learning programs, while 6 respondents were enrolled in more than one educational program organized by the National School of Political Science and Public Administration at the same time. 193 respondents had a Facebook account, while 31 did not. This proves that for a wide majority of the students Facebook is a topic of interest, but it also raises the question whether this network could be effectively used *instead* more classic means of communication (notice boards, announcements made through spoken communication, e-mail) or not.

**Table 1. The socio-demographical characteristics of the sample**

Variable Labels	Frequency (N=224)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	32	14
Female	161	72
Age		
Under 24	123	55
25-29	40	18

30- 34	17	8
35- 39	6	3
40- 44	2	1
45-50	2	1
Over 50	3	1
Work Status		
Employed	125	56
Unemployed	68	30
Income level		
Under 163 EUR	52	23
163-325 EUR	33	15
326 -581 EUR	45	20
Over 581 EUR	44	20
Family Status		
Married	25	11
Living with partner	19	8
Single		
Divorced	145	65
Widow(-er)	4	2
	0	0

The sample gender and age distribution correspond to the gender and age distribution in the entire population of students at the chosen College. Also, the work status frequencies reflect to some extent the situation of the entire population, as sources from the NUPSPA who are concerned with student statistics declare.

### ***A. Generation Y students and technology***

Our study confirms that students who are members of the Y Generation are indeed digitally literate and extremely proficient with technology or at least that is their perception regarding themselves. They believe that they are very keen on finding the relevant information on the Internet (77%) and that they are very capable of evaluating if a website offers actual and relevant information on a specific topic (70%), proving that they believe to have good online investigative skills. Although results-oriented and not necessarily patient, as they admit being, they also claim to be flexible, adaptable and well prepared to solve problems. For example, most of them (73%) believe they are very keen on PowerPoint and that they can deliver flexible presentations (64%). They also believe they can identify a problem even when the information is missing (57%) and identify the best suited resources to find the information they need

in order to solve any problem (69%). Among these resources, the Internet is ever present, especially when they want to “investigate” a new topic. They always access the Internet to find out new and relevant information – whether concerning personal interest, such as learning about the best offers regarding a product they wish to buy (76%), or academic aspects (70%). The results show that students are not only technically savvy but also fast thinkers who use the Internet as a significant source for finding answers, regardless of the questions. These discoveries are in line with prior research, in the sense that they endorse the idea that students become critical consumers as technological advancement forces them to “develop thinking and investigative skills” (Tapscott, 2009, p.21).

However, they tend to investigate the problems by themselves and rarely share the answers they get with others. Their engagement with helping peers find the information they need is not very high: 28% of the students said they respond on questions on forums when they know the answer while 36% said they never do that. These answers give us a glimpse on how these youngsters relate to information gathering and sharing, stressing the fact that they are mostly individualists. As they seem not to trust others as much as members of previous generations did and they are self-absorbed, independent and fascinated by customization, as literature shows, today’s students could benefit from having individual access to customizable means of communication with their College professors and College administrative staff. This could work better for them than the common practice of public announcements made through the students’ group leader or e-mailing.

Strangely, we noticed that in spite of what literature shows about the unfolding of a “small screen revolution” (Tapscott, 2009, p.46), this is not applicable in the Romanian context for the time being, as many students totally disagreed with accessing Facebook through mobile phones (27%), while 29% admitted they use it. It is possible that at least some of our respondents prefer using Facebook from a computer because they do not have Internet on their phones or because they wish to save money by surfing less using the mobile phone. Another factor could be that they have access to computers most of the time (see the number of students who are employed and their income levels), so they do not find it necessary to be connected on Facebook by the phone.

### ***B. Generation Y students on Facebook***

As we have found through empirical observation, most of our students had Facebook accounts, so we wanted to identify the reasons for which they start-

ed using Facebook and how did they perceived it after creating the accounts, in order to understand what place could it occupy in their relation to school-related activities. We identified four main characteristics of Facebook that appeared to have an impact on students' decision to set up an account: the facilitation of contacting friends, colleagues and acquaintances, which would have been more difficult otherwise, the newsfeed's presence, which helps them stay informed on various topics of interest, the novelty of the medium, which triggers their enthusiasm related to technological innovations, and the entertaining aspects of the medium.

Most of our participants said the main reason for them being on Facebook was "the need to be in contact with long-distance friends and acquaintances" (33% and respectively 38% describing it as the most important, respectively an important reason for setting up an account). Facebook is widely used as a very important or important means to reconnect with old friends and colleagues by 24% respectively 38% of our sample. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Alba & Stay, 2008; Awl, 2011), which confirm that the main perceived purpose of Facebook is to connect friends around the world. Further, not only do students have an account, but they also use Facebook in multiple occasions during the day (62%), in their quest to "stay informed" regarding the subjects their Facebook friends write about on their walls. This "need of information" was rated the second most important reason for setting an account (34% rated it very important and 31% rated it important), proving they use the network not only to communicate with friends using chat or direct messages but also to keep in touch in a virtually non-communicative way – by reading their friends' updates in the newsfeed. Their enthusiasm regarding the technological evolutions also rated high in the motivations list, 26% and respectively 21% of them saying that this was a very important, respectively an important factor for their decision, proving once again that Gen Y youngsters are interested in maintaining contact with the latest ICT developments. However, when they decided to create their Facebook profiles, students took into account the entertaining offers of this medium to various degrees: to a large extent (19%), to a moderate extent (24%), relatively a little (20%) or not at all (16%). This discovery shows that their SNS fascination is not strongly related to their need of being entertained, although the entertaining aspects of it are taken into account by a significant number of them.

Three other factors seem to have had a significant influence in the decision making process: youngsters were simply curious to find out what Facebook is like; they took into account direct group pressure, as more and more of their

friends used it and asked them to join, and they thought of the possibility to use it for self-promotion. Most of our respondents (32%) agreed that curiosity was one of the reasons why they created a Facebook account, as long as at that moment it was “the latest thing”. A quarter of the students we questioned stated that because they saw “everyone is on Facebook” they felt it was very important to have an account themselves, while 18% said this was an important aspect for them when they decided to join. However, for 20% of them direct group pressure was totally insignificant in the decision making process. This suggests that youngsters generally tend to embrace ICT novelty, including SNS, in an independent manner, usually rejecting direct group recommendations, but desire to know what the (many) others find interesting. The characteristics of the network (as known before being part of it) triggered the urge to self-promote online using this medium for 19% of the students, while 23% of them thought this was a relatively important opportunity to work on their public image and 21% did not even think of the possibility of using Facebook as a self-promotion tool.

Later on, as they began using the network, their perceptions of it and the possible uses and misuses of their accounts grew different. We measured their perceptions of Facebook’s characteristics and role asking them to rate various affirmations describing the network and their experiences as members of it on a 5-item Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree). Overall, there seems to be a negotiation going on tacitly among users, who fall between the ends of a continuum: at one of the ends are the ones who would only communicate public, professional aspects of their lives, while at the other end are the ones who would share their whole day to day living experiences and private thoughts. We do not aim to draw a typology of Facebook users but the results have led us to recognize the existence of two different groups of students, who might embrace differently the network in relation to College related topics: one group comprises professionally oriented students and the other comprises the private, “small world” oriented students. These groups’ members share opinions related to the network and its advantages, proving that they choose to use Facebook differently but they understand its technological characteristics in the same way. One of the most important common beliefs among all our respondents is related to the fact that Facebook is “easy to use”, thing which binds them all together. This characteristic of the network is very important to 33% of those questioned and important to 37% of them, proving that the Millennials are technically oriented but enjoy using the innovations described by usability (such as user-friendly, intuitive, easy to navigate websites).

Facebook users have joined the network bearing in mind different motivations and, accordingly, they planned to use Facebook in various ways. As we have shown above, some students believed Facebook would work for them as a tool for improving their online presence as viewed from a professional perspective. Other students preferred to create online, along with their peers, a small world where they wish to share personal information and to be entertained. But no matter to what group they belong, the wide majority of the students (70%) rated favourable the fact that they can communicate with many persons, more rapidly, thing which confirms their lack of patience and their need to stay connected with friends and acquaintances, proving in the same time that the networks fulfils its promise of connecting people. From this point on, their understandings of Facebook networking start to differentiate. The professional oriented group is more inclined towards using the network as a means to connect with profession related acquaintances, members using their account page as a public place, while the small world oriented group members are more inclined to use it as a private meeting zone, where only selected friends are allowed to enter. This difference in perceiving Facebook networking purpose is then best described by the way students rate the connection between their network presence, interests and needs.

Although Facebook is generally seen as easy to use and students use it heavily to connect and reconnect with friends, colleagues and other people they know (57% agreed), they generally did not seem to believe that by using it they followed in any way their interests and needs. 31% were not certain of the importance of the network's role in their quest to follow their interests, while 31% of them agreed Facebook helps them achieve personal goals. Results reveal that for about a third of the respondents Facebook plays a minor role or has no perceived influence over their goals. Even though many of these people are subscribed to profession-related pages and personalities in their industries of interest and 19% even created the account with the aim of constructing an online professional image of themselves, only 12% of them consciously try, after creating the account, to use Facebook in a "strategic" manner, building a network of professionals and describing themselves as professionals through their profiles and posts. Unsurprisingly, in this context, the majority of the students (60%) use Facebook to communicate with friends and to find out what the people they know do lately (54%). As regarding what kind of information they post and read in the newsfeed, over 54% of them share "new stuff" and information they perceive as useful, while 50% read their friends' updates and posts because they want to stay informed professionally. Obviously, posting information one perceives as useful hints to the fact that about

half of our respondents are interested in nurturing the relations with their Facebook friends by “feeding” them with what they consider to be useful or at least providing them (useful or at least entertaining) news. This practice allows us to believe that users desire to present themselves and act as members of virtual communities, partly because these communities are for the more private-inclined users “small worlds” where friends can reconnect and casually socialize, partly because feeding the community members who give them professional data reinforces ones position into the group, allowing him or her to gain visibility and respect among fellow professionals, if his or her posts are well received by the professional community.

However, what happens online does not necessarily reflect offline. Most of the events announced on Facebook are rarely attended offline by the people who declare they would join. For example, only 17% of our sample said they attend events announced on Facebook, while 51% never fill their agenda with such events. This finding might suggest that students are invited to many events that fall out of their interests range, or that they do not want to participate to the events where they are invited because they have objective reasons for not doing so (i.e. the event is held in another city or there is a large participation fee that prohibits them to go) or prefer not to meet the people who invite them yet, until they feel their offline image could match the one they project online. In support of this last supposition, the results of our research show that a very large percentage of the youngsters (46%) rated negatively the use of Facebook as a personal photograph archive made available for others to see. This is somehow contradictory to studies that strongly affirm that Facebook is mostly perceived as “a visual scrapbook” (Wittkower, 2010, p.51) and that Generation Y is “the most visually sophisticated of any generation” (Buzzard et al., 2011, p.131). It might also mean that students are, in fact, very self-conscious, and that they carefully choose the photos they upload because they desire to create a specific reflection of themselves online, for their friends or colleagues to see. The process might be subconscious, as most of them denied using Facebook for self-promotion (75%), although they admitted to having created the profile for this reason (42%).

Furthermore, and in addition to the argument above, only 26% actually use Facebook to entertain themselves, while 33% say they never do so. These findings are somehow contradictory; as long as the majority created the account and state they use the account to communicate with their long-time friends and not with their professional acquaintances. Possibly, they joined the network because they needed an easy to use means of communication

with people they knew well and who were in different geographical locations so they could not catch up with them face to face, but ended up befriending College colleagues, teachers and professional acquaintances with whom they share job related or College related information, as more than half of them admitted. Obviously, they might wish to create and maintain a specific public image on Facebook for everyone to see, including childhood friends and people who otherwise know them well. However, regarding who did they befriend with and what sort of information they generally exchanged using Facebook, 57% of the sample members said they had more than 15 College colleagues in their friend lists and 53% said they used Facebook to communicate mostly with their College colleagues. Coupling these answers with the ones regarding the type of information they post and the kind of information they seek in the newsfeed, we understand that about a half of the students use Facebook to communicate with College colleagues and other professional acquaintances on professional topics or for sharing things that could be useful to these people (from a business-oriented perspective or from a personal one). As we can see, Facebook became, this way, a replacing tool for Yahoo! groups and perhaps for discussion forums too, as it tends to incorporate more and more features year after year, competing with other online services (e-mail providers, chat rooms, video sharing platforms, other social networks such as Twitter, photo archives etc.).

These findings might suggest that students try to use Facebook both as a personal and professional tool and that they might encounter some difficulties in separating the image they want to show to their friends and the one that they would like their colleagues/ professional acquaintances to see.

### ***C. Facebook for Universities from a student oriented perspective***

For the students we surveyed, Facebook seems to be a catch-all tool with both professional related utility and private use necessity. In this case, how could a University better serve its students by adopting a student-focused model based on collaboration using Facebook? First, by understanding what these students expect from the University in this regard and second, by learning how students already use this SNS in connection to College related subjects.

At the moment we gathered our data, almost half of the students who filled our survey (49%) already were part of College-related groups on Facebook and 54% of them declared they regularly read their colleagues' posts regarding College matters. More than half (51%) of the students communicated with colleagues about administrative topics and 48% debated over academic as-

pects in the same context. This means that for about a half of them Facebook is an important tool when it comes to managing their agenda concerning College projects, research and administrative information.

In addition to that and in line with prior research (Moran, Seaman & Hester, 2011), many of them support the idea of a closer interaction with the College on Facebook, but prefer an impersonal way of communication, such as a page updated periodically with relevant administrative information and public events invitations. University staff could create Facebook pages for each College, in order to welcome this suggestion. The official page of the College should then take up the role of a virtual notice board for distributing official information regarding administrative aspects related to the academic activities and events, as 75% of our sample desire. The Facebook page would be then a means for students to stay informed concerning College matters without having to surf the official website of the university or College for news and, of course, without having to actually go to the College to find the information. Because the Facebook newsfeed is easy to customize, as our respondents pointed out in repeated turns, and users can subscribe to whomever they desire, including press agencies, people they know and other institutions, reading it would provide them personalized information, flexibility, and save their time.

If a College page could help students learn about administrative stuff and professional events, professors could also make use of Facebook to improve their students' learning experience. The degree to which students in our sample currently communicate with their professors using it is extremely small. Most of them did not have any teacher in their friend lists and 32% of the students who had befriended teachers said they do not read teachers' posts at all, while 31% said they sometimes do. More so, 50% of the students who have befriended teachers never communicate with their teachers on Facebook on academic topics and the same applies to more informal communication aspects (51%). The ceiling effect could explain this fact but at least for 36% of our respondents it does not, as long as they do not even wish to be contacted by teachers using Facebook private messages. Instead, they expect professors to send them e-mails.

Even if the Facebook mediated relation between students and their teachers does not seem to be rich at the moment, or promising, there are two things that students expect and strongly support their teachers to do. First, they would like teachers to have separate Facebook accounts for academic related

discussions (64%), such as courses details and links to interesting bibliography sources. Second, 44% of the students expect teachers to create and invite them to join thematic Facebook groups where they would talk with the teacher and with fellow colleagues about administrative topics related to the courses, as examination criteria, schedule, etc. and share bibliographical resources. These findings suggest that students would generally prefer teachers to use Facebook to facilitate their access to online bibliography and to save their time by allowing them to speak in thematic groups where the teacher is the moderator, even though they are already part of student created groups related to College. University staff could recommend teachers create pages and/ or groups for each course they teach and invite students to join. Using separate pages would both maintain an institutional approach and bring the College related activity in this partially private, partially professional place which is Facebook.

How students could learn to manage their online presence on these groups or pages so that they would not transform teacher-student discussions or student-student academic discussions in student-student non-academic discussions is still a subject to be discussed, as Facebook does not offer yet the same organizing tools as classic discussion forums. Establishing rules for discussions participants and discussion moderation could be a working solution.

## Conclusions

As our study demonstrates that the overall perception of students when it comes to technology use in education process is good (70%), it proves they are open towards experiencing a different kind of learning experience, including the mixing of technology for facilitating communication and learning resources sharing. By taking into consideration Gen Y students heavy use of Internet as an informational resource – and the Facebook employment in order to create and maintain relationships – we can assert that e-learning 2.0 using SNS has a great opportunity in shaping future education in Romania. Nevertheless, there are still many questions to be answered when it comes to employing SNS in the academic environment. Among the wide spread concerns student online behaviour, privacy and security issues have been underlined by previous research (Holotescu & Naaji, 2007). We recognize the possible threats any SNS use can create in this particular context but we believe that, by far, the collaboration between users permitted by Facebook in a way no previous SNS has done should be taken into account.

Generation Y members obviously force a change in the way faculties and teachers communicate with students, asking them to continuously adapt to the use of new technologies and mediums. Their mode of understanding the online space evolves with the passing years, as the mediums and innovative technologies shape and reshape the Internet role in people's lives. For example, even if at the beginning Facebook was widely perceived as a personal tool aimed at socializing with selected peers and the presence of institutions was not welcomed by a significant number of users, it became lately, as our study reveals, an expected and well received aid which can improve the communication flow between students and their College teachers and staff.

Consequently, we encourage university staff to recommend that teachers employ Facebook pages and thematic groups as an aid to better communicate with their students regarding school topics. Also, we recommend university staff to create College pages on Facebook and post constantly administrative information and other announcements they would otherwise post on information boards.

Obviously, these recommendations related to academic Facebook use might apply for a limited period of time. With students growing understanding of the network and along with the changes of the network as its managers decide them to be (adding or disabling features of it), Facebook may grow old and be replaced by other networks or online facilities, following the fate of hi5.com or myspace.com. Yet for the moment, Facebook is still an emerging network in Romania; students are still enthusiastic regarding its use and expect faculties to share their love for ITC novelty and embrace SNSs in their communication practices. This is why we recommend universities in Romania to take into account the advice we pointed above.

**Acknowledgement:** This work was supported in part by the National University of Political Sciences and Public Administration – College of Communication and Public Relations under Grant “A new communication, a new marketing?” – 2012-2013.

## References

- Alba, J., and Stay, J. (2008). *I'm On Facebook – Now What? How to Get Personal, Business and Professional Value from Facebook*, Cupertino: Happy About.
- Awl, D. (2011). *Facebook Me! A guide to Socializing, Sharing and Promoting on Facebook*, Berkeley: Peachpit Press.

Barna, G. (1995). *Generation Next: What you need to Know about today's Youth*, Ventura: Regal Books.

Boscha, T.E. (2009). Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town, *Communication: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 35 (2), 185-200.

Brown, J.S., and Adler, R.P. (2008). Minds on Fire. Open Education, the Long Tail, and Learning 2.0, *Educause Review*, 43 (1), 16-32.

Buzzard, C., Crittenden, V.L., Crittenden, W.F., and McCarty, P. (2011). The Use of Digital Technologies in the Classroom: A Teaching and Learning Perspective, *Journal of Marketing Education*, 33 (2), 131-139.

Cable, J. (2005). Generation Y Safety: The Challenges of Reaching the Under-30 Worker; they're Computer-Literate, Eager to Please and Products of the MTV-And OSHA-Generation. Now It's Up to You to Help Them Stay Safe on the Job. Are You Up to the Challenge? *Occupational Hazards*, 67 (11).

Chaudhuri, S., and Rajashi, G. (2011). Reverse Mentoring: A Social Exchange Tool for Keeping the Boomers Engaged and Millennials Committed. *Human Resource Development Review*, 11 (1), 55-76.

Dagnaud, M. (2011). *Génération Y. Les jeunes et les réseaux sociaux, de la dérision à la subversion*. [Generation Y. Young People and Social Networks, from Derision to Subversion], Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Gansky, L. (2011). *În rețea [The Mesh: Why the Future of Business is sharing]*, Bucharest: Publica.

Hewitt, A., and Forte, A. (2006). Crossing boundaries: Identity management and student/College relationships on the Facebook, presented at the Computer Supported Cooperative Work Conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, November 4-8.

Hansen, J.C., and Leuty, M.E. (2012). Work Values across Generations. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20 (1), 34-52.

Helsper, E.J. (2010). Gendered Internet Use across Generations and Life Stages, *Communication Research*, 37 (3), 352-374.

Holotescu, C., and Naaji, A. (2007). *Tehnologii Web [Web Technologies]*, Arad: Vasile Goldiș University Press.

Huntley, R. (2006). *The World According to Y: Inside the New Adult Generation*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Lowe, B., and Laffey, D. (2011). Is Twitter for the Birds?: Using Twitter to Enhance Student Learning in a Marketing Course. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 33(2), 183-192 .

Mazer, J.P., Murphy, R.E., and Simonds, C.J. (2007). I'll See You On "Facebook": The Effects of Computer-Mediated Teacher Self-Disclosure on Student

Motivation, Affective Learning, and Classroom Climate. *Communication Education*, 56 (1), 1-17.

Mihalcea, A.D., Mitan A., and Vițelar, A. (2012). Generation Y: Views on Entrepreneurship". *Economia. Seria Management*, 15 (2), 277-287.

Moran, M., Seaman, J., and Tinti-Kane, H. (2011). Teaching, Learning, and Sharing: How Today's Higher Education College Use Social Media, Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group. Retrieved from: <http://www.pearsonlearningsolutions.com/educators/pearson-social-media-survey-2011-bw.pdf>

Oh, C.H. (2003). Information Communication Technology and the New University: A View on eLearning, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 585 (1), 134-152.

Roblyer, M.D., McDaniel, M., Webb, M., Herman, J., and Witty, J.V. (2010). Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 13 (3), 134-140.

Rosen, A. (2009). *E-Learning 2.0 Proven Practices and Emerging Technologies to Achieve Results*, New York: Amacom.

Shih, C. (2009). *The Facebook era: tapping online social networks to build better products, reach new audiences, and sell more stuff*, Boston: Pearson Education.

Tapscott, D. (2010). *Grown Up Digital. How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Trzesniewski, K.H., and Donnellan, M.B. (2010). Rethinking "Generation Me": A Study of Cohort Effects From 1976–2006, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5 (1), 58-75.

Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S.M., Hoffman, B.J., and Lance, C.E. (2010). Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values. *Journal of Management*, 36 (5), 1117-1142.

Weiler, A. (2004). Information-Seeking Behavior in Generation Y Students: Motivation, Critical Thinking, and Learning Theory. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 31 (1), 46-53.

Wittkower, D.E. (ed.) (2010). *Facebook and philosophy: what's on your mind?* Chicago: Open Court Publishing.

Zandt, D. (2010). *Share This! How You Will Change the World with Social Networking*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.