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# EXAMINING INFORMATION, CONSULTATION, AND COMMUNICATION IN ROMANIAN LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS WITHIN THE ONLINE SPHERE: A CASE STUDY OF CONSTANTA AND CLUJ-NAPOCA

**EXAMEN DE LA INFORMACIÓN, CONSULTA Y COMUNICACIÓN EN LAS  
ADMINISTRACIONES PÚBLICAS LOCALES RUMANAS DENTRO DE LA  
ESFERA EN LÍNEA: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE CONSTANTA Y CLUJ-NAPOCA**

**Mari-Isabella Stan:** Ovidius University of Constanța. Romania.  
[isabella.stan@365.univ-ovidius.ro](mailto:isabella.stan@365.univ-ovidius.ro)

**Tănase Tasente:** Ovidius University of Constanța. Romania.  
[tanase.tasente@365.univ-ovidius.ro](mailto:tanase.tasente@365.univ-ovidius.ro)

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of information, consultation, and communication in Romanian Local Public Administrations within the Online Sphere, where digital transition supplements traditional methods and introduces new opportunities and challenges. The focus is on public engagement in online communications, especially concerning public consultation invitations from local administrations. Data from Facebook posts by the municipalities of Constanta and Cluj-Napoca was analyzed using FanPageKarma and RStudio, providing insights into public participation. The research underscores the importance of online platforms in promoting transparency, citizen engagement, and collaborative decision-making in open governance. It reveals that

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despite the number of public consultation posts being relatively low, they affirm the commitment to participatory governance. Interestingly, posts not explicitly inviting public consultation saw higher engagement rates, suggesting the necessity of appealing content and audience understanding. The study also found that urban planning posts had lower engagement, indicating a potential need for simpler communication strategies for technical topics. The findings highlight that while digital platforms have been used effectively for citizen engagement, there is a need for continuous improvement and adaptation to maintain transparent and inclusive governance. The research adds to our understanding of the strategies employed in digital transitions and the importance of gauging public perception of online communication.

**Keywords:** public consultation, urban planning, Facebook, online communication, local public administration, Romania, Constanta, Cluj-Napoca.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga el impacto de la información, la consulta y la comunicación en las administraciones públicas locales rumanas dentro de la esfera en línea, donde la transición digital complementa los métodos tradicionales e introduce nuevas oportunidades y desafíos. La atención se centra en la participación pública en las comunicaciones en línea, especialmente en lo que respecta a las invitaciones a consultas públicas de las administraciones locales. Los datos de las publicaciones de Facebook de los municipios de Constanta y Cluj-Napoca se analizaron mediante FanPageKarma y RStudio, lo que brindó información sobre la participación pública. La investigación subraya la importancia de las plataformas en línea para promover la transparencia, la participación ciudadana y la toma de decisiones colaborativa en la gobernanza abierta. Revela que a pesar de que el número de puestos de consulta pública es relativamente bajo, afirman el compromiso con la gobernanza participativa. Curiosamente, las publicaciones que no invitaban explícitamente a la consulta pública registraron tasas de participación más altas, lo que sugiere la necesidad de contenido atractivo y comprensión de la audiencia. El estudio también encontró que los puestos de planificación urbana tenían una menor participación, lo que indica una posible necesidad de estrategias de comunicación más simples para temas técnicos. Los hallazgos destacan que, si bien las plataformas digitales se han utilizado de manera efectiva para la participación ciudadana, existe la necesidad de una mejora y adaptación continuas para mantener una gobernanza transparente e inclusiva. La investigación se suma a nuestra comprensión de las estrategias empleadas en las transiciones digitales y la importancia de medir la percepción pública de la comunicación en línea.

**Palabras clave:** consulta pública, planificación urbana, Facebook, comunicación en línea, administración pública local, Rumania, Constanta, Cluj-Napoca.

## **Análise da informação, consulta e comunicação nas administrações públicas locais romenas no âmbito da esfera online: um estudo de caso de Constanta e Cluj-Napoca**

### **RESUMO**

Este estudo investiga o impacto da informação, consulta e comunicação nas administrações públicas locais romenas na esfera online, onde a transição digital complementa os métodos tradicionais e introduz novas oportunidades e desafios. A tónica é colocada na participação do público nas comunicações em linha, especialmente no que diz respeito aos convites para consultas públicas por parte das administrações locais. Os dados das publicações no Facebook dos municípios de Constanta e Cluj-Napoca foram analisados utilizando FanPageKarma e RStudio, fornecendo informações sobre a participação do público. A investigação sublinha a importância das plataformas em linha na promoção da transparência, da participação dos cidadãos e da tomada de decisões em colaboração no âmbito da governação aberta. Revela que, embora o número de mensagens de consulta pública seja relativamente baixo, estas afirmam o empenho na governação participativa. Curiosamente, as mensagens que não convidavam explicitamente à consulta pública registaram taxas de participação mais elevadas, o que sugere a necessidade de conteúdos cativantes e de compreensão por parte do público. O estudo constatou igualmente que os postos de planeamento urbano tiveram uma menor participação, indicando uma possível necessidade de estratégias de comunicação mais simples para questões técnicas. As conclusões sublinham que, embora as plataformas digitais tenham sido utilizadas de forma eficaz para a participação dos cidadãos, é necessário um aperfeiçoamento e uma adaptação contínuos para manter uma governação transparente e inclusiva. A investigação contribui para a nossa compreensão das estratégias utilizadas nas transições digitais e da importância de medir a perceção pública da comunicação em linha.

**Palavras chave:** consulta pública, planeamento urbano, Facebook, comunicação em linha, administração pública local, Roménia, Constanta, Cluj-Napoca.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The evolution of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has had a substantial impact on public administration. This transformation has been marked by increased efficiency, transparency, and the rapid dissemination of information. Androniceanu (2021) notes the challenges posed by this increased transparency in public administration, particularly in terms of achieving good democratic governance. As digital technology continues to advance, the task for public administration is to harness its potential while ensuring transparency, accountability, and data protection (Radu, 2019).

In the context of Romanian local public administrations, a distinct shift towards online communication has been observed. This shift is seen as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional communication methods (Matei et al., 2016). It is a transition that is not without its challenges, but it also presents considerable opportunities.

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The legal frameworks in Romania offer guidelines for public administration communication, setting out the modalities of communication and interaction. The advent of online platforms has added a new layer to this framework (Mickoleit, 2014). These platforms have the potential to reach a broader audience, disseminate information more quickly, and respond more efficiently to public inquiries (Meltzer et al., 2018).

However, adapting these legal frameworks to accommodate online communication is a complex task. While digital platforms facilitate communication and information dissemination, they also raise questions about data protection and accountability. The challenge for public administrations lies in finding a balance: using digital technology to its fullest potential while ensuring that transparency and accountability are not compromised.

As public administrations navigate this transition, understanding the strategies being employed and the measures taken to overcome associated challenges is critical. The research by Rus et al. (2022) highlights the importance of this exploration, contributing to a broader understanding of the evolving dynamics of public administration communication.

Public perceptions of online communication also play a significant role. As Slave et al. (2023) suggest, assessing public opinion can provide valuable insights. Stakeholder trust in online communication platforms is not solely built on the reliability and security of these platforms. It also depends on the quality and accessibility of the information provided (Stan et al., 2021).

Understanding stakeholder perceptions and interactions with these platforms is vital. An open dialogue with stakeholders can help identify areas for improvement and enhance the effectiveness of online communication platforms. The feedback and concerns of users can inform the ongoing development of these platforms, ensuring they meet the needs and expectations of the public.

In conclusion, the role of online communication in public administration is multifaceted. It complements traditional channels of communication, offers a more efficient means of information dissemination, and facilitates greater transparency. However, adapting to this new mode of communication requires careful navigation. Legal frameworks must be adapted, and the perceptions and trust of stakeholders must be considered.

As we continue to explore the evolving dynamics of public administration communication, these factors provide valuable insights. They contribute to the ongoing discourse on the digitization of public administration, highlighting the opportunities and challenges presented by this transition. As public administrations continue to adapt and innovate, the ultimate aim remains the same: to serve the public effectively, transparently, and responsibly.

## **2. Literature Review**

Public participation, information, and communication in local public administration are critical components for democratic governance, fostering inclusivity and transparency in decision-making processes (Androniceanu, 2021; Acasandre, 2020). The role of these elements in public administration has garnered significant attention in recent years, with scholars exploring their implications in a variety of contexts and settings. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the available literature on the importance of these elements for citizen participation in public decision-making.

### **Public Participation in Decision-Making Processes**

Public participation is a key element of a functioning democracy, allowing citizens to engage in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Durose and Richardson, 2015). The importance of public participation is underscored by Acasandre (2020), who analyzed the process in Bucharest. The study revealed that public participation can contribute to more effective and democratic decision-making processes, reinforcing the legitimacy of public institutions.

Horgan (2022) echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the devolution of decision-making and the incorporation of equitable place-based participation in planning. This approach recognizes the local knowledge of citizens and involves them directly in creating sustainable urban environments. Similarly, Béliveau-Côté et al. (2022) demonstrated how self-organizing groups, such as cycling groups, can contribute to urban planning, illustrating the power of grassroots participation.

### **Information and Communication in Local Public Administration**

Androniceanu (2021) underscores the importance of transparency in public administration, arguing that it is a critical aspect of good democratic governance. Transparency is often facilitated by the strategic use of information, such as Open Government Data policies, which can contribute to the entrenchment of certain political ideologies (Franceschetti, 2016).

The role of technology in facilitating information flow and public participation is increasingly significant in contemporary society. Hemmersam et al. (2015) demonstrated how urban data visualization can aid public participation in planning, while Roblek et al. (2020) illustrated the adoption of e-democracy tools in several European countries. These studies highlight the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in enhancing public participation and transparency in decision-making processes.

### **Public Administration and Reputation Management**

The reputation of public organizations plays a significant role in shaping citizens' trust and willingness to participate in public decision-making (Meirinhos et al., 2022). The authors argue that several dimensions, such as leadership, social responsibility, working environment, and emotional appeal, significantly impact the reputation of public institutions. Hence, effective public communication strategies and transparency

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in operation are necessary for fostering a positive reputation and, consequently, citizens' participation in decision-making processes.

### **Public Participation in Urban Planning and Sustainable Development**

Public participation in urban planning can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of cities (Nae et al., 2019; Loewen et al., 2022). Nae et al. (2019) highlight the role of housing activism initiatives in participatory planning and urban sustainable development in Bucharest, Romania. The study argues that these initiatives can help resolve land-use conflicts and promote more inclusive urban development processes.

In a similar vein, Loewen et al. (2022) explore the contested urban green space development in Trondheim, Norway. They argue that public participation is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of urban green spaces and achieving environmental justice. Such studies underscore the significance of public participation in urban planning and highlight the potential of local communities in promoting sustainable urban development.

### **Technology and Public Participation**

The role of technology in facilitating public participation has been a recurring theme in the literature. Pereira et al. (2012) discuss the role of social media as an e-participation tool, arguing that it can significantly enhance the public space by fostering public dialogue and participation.

Similarly, Slave et al. (2023) illustrate how self-organizing maps can be used to assess public opinion in urban planning in Romania. They argue that this technique can provide valuable insights into public sentiments, thereby promoting more inclusive decision-making processes.

Digital public relations practices also play a significant role in promoting public participation, as demonstrated by Ünlü et al. (2022) in their study on ecological municipalism in the Lahti Municipality. The authors argue that effective digital public relations strategies can foster better communication between public administrations and citizens, thereby enhancing public participation.

### **The Role of Indicators and Measurement Tools**

Ivars-Baidal et al. (2021) underscore the importance of indicators as a management tool in measuring the progress of smart destinations. They argue that these indicators can help public administrations monitor and evaluate their strategies, ensuring that they align with citizens' needs and expectations. Similarly, Văidianu and Ristea (2018) emphasize the importance of marine spatial planning in Romania, highlighting the need for evidence-based decision-making in public administration.

In conclusion, the literature indicates that public participation, information, and communication in local public administration play a crucial role in democratic governance, promoting transparency, and enhancing citizen participation in public decision-making. Technology has been identified as a key enabler in this process, with

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e-democracy tools, social media, and digital public relations practices enhancing the flow of information and facilitating public participation. However, the literature also underscores the need for public administrations to effectively manage their reputations, promote transparency, and use indicators to measure their progress and align their strategies with citizens' needs and expectations.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The overarching objective of this research is to evaluate public engagement in the online communications of local public administrations, with a focus on invitations to public consultation.

In an age increasingly characterized by digital interaction, the role of the internet in facilitating communication between government entities and the public has grown significantly. This dynamic has been further amplified by the emerging paradigm of open governance, which emphasizes transparency, citizen engagement, and collaborative decision-making. Amid these changes, local public administrations are recognizing the need to more effectively leverage online platforms to reach, inform, and engage their constituents.

This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of online public engagement strategies (on Facebook) utilized by local public administrations, specifically pertaining to invitations to public consultations. Public consultations serve as a critical mechanism for participatory democracy, enabling citizens to have a direct impact on the policies and decisions that affect their lives. However, the effectiveness of these consultations is inherently tied to the level of public engagement, which in turn is influenced by the nature and effectiveness of the communications used to promote these opportunities.

The research instrument we used in our study is a combination of the FanPageKarma platform and the RStudio software. Each tool offers unique features that support different aspects of the research process, making them integral to our approach.

Leveraging FanPageKarma, a comprehensive online analytics instrument, facilitates the assessment of social media engagement metrics across multiple platforms. Its particular effectiveness in analyzing Facebook activity, combined with over 350 standard and customizable measures, provides extensive insights into social media performance. Social media practitioners and researchers exploit this tool to fine-tune engagement strategies and fuel community growth, gaining competitive advantage via nuanced post strategy analysis and performance metrics optimization.

Notably, FanPageKarma permits detailed exploration of both personal and competitive profiles, promoting a comprehensive understanding of social media dynamics. This capacity for extensive profile examination distinguishes it from other tools, enhancing research accuracy and effectiveness. Moreover, its robust data extraction and analysis capabilities facilitated the retrieval of 10,222 and 2,661 Facebook posts from the municipalities of Constanta (2014-2023) and Cluj-Napoca (2017-2023) respectively, providing a vast data pool for thorough analysis. Through FanPageKarma, we acquired detailed insights into this extracted data, overcoming the analytical limitations of alternative tools.

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In response to possible queries concerning the exclusive exploitation of Facebook data in this research, it was discerned that the two municipalities predominantly rely on Facebook as their principal online communication platform, this social network being the primary instrument employed by local public administrations in Romania. Supplementary platforms, like Instagram, are generally utilized more with the intention of enhancing institutional image as opposed to generating relevant data for public consultation. Furthermore, an absence of active Twitter accounts associated with the two municipalities substantiates our decision to concentrate exclusively on Facebook data.

Complementing FanPageKarma's data extraction capability, we employed RStudio for data analysis, a free, open-source integrated development environment (IDE) designed specifically for the R programming language. RStudio was chosen for its superior capacity for data manipulation, which is an essential component of this study given the size of the dataset. In addition, RStudio's sophisticated visualization capabilities facilitated the creation of intuitive and informative graphical representations of our data.

The environment supports direct code execution, allowing us to interactively explore the data and instantly view the results. This feature made it easier to understand and analyze the data. Furthermore, with the aid of the tidyverse package, a collection of R packages designed for data science, we could effectively filter and classify the data according to our requirements.

To be more specific, we initially filtered the posts referring to "public consultation." The dataset was then divided into posts referring to "urban planning" and other topics subjected to public consultation.

The choice of the municipalities of Constanta and Cluj-Napoca as case studies was not random. Constanta, as one of the largest cities by population and economic influence in Romania, offers a substantial amount of data due to its extensive use of Facebook for public communication over a long period. Cluj-Napoca, on the other hand, represents a dynamic smart city known for its vibrant tech and startup scene, which could imply a more engaged online audience and innovative public consultation approaches.

To evaluate the online public involvement in the topics about public consultation, we computed the engagement rate for the respective posts. The engagement rate is calculated by comparing the interactions (i.e., reactions, comments, and shares) to the number of active fans at the time of the post's publication. This method provides a more nuanced understanding of how much the audience is actively participating in discussions about public consultation, rather than simply viewing or liking the content.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Over the past years – from 2014 until 2023, amongst a total of 12,883 Facebook posts, 139 specifically mention public consultations held by the municipalities of Constanta and Cluj-Napoca. These civic engagements, organized by the local authorities, invite citizens to voice their thoughts, suggestions, and recommendations on various public



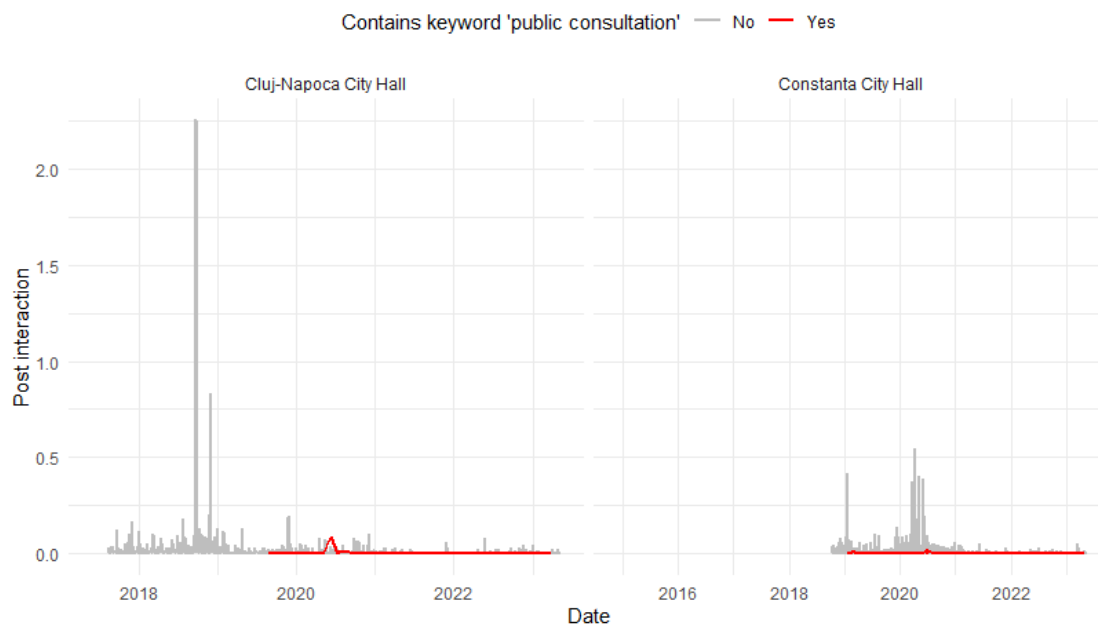
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interest issues. This relatively small number of posts highlights the effort of these municipalities to promote participatory governance, despite the vast digital landscape. The public consultations represent a cornerstone of democratic societies, providing residents with a platform to influence decisions that impact their lives. Both Constanta and Cluj-Napoca are showing a commitment to active citizenship, promoting transparency, and fostering community involvement. By utilizing social media, they extend their reach, providing an easily accessible channel for people to engage in these consultations. These posts, though a mere fraction of the total, carry a significant weight, encouraging dialogue and collaboration between citizens and their local government.

**Public consultations posts**

**Figure 1.**

*Facebook posts related to public consultation and their engagement.*



**Source:** Own elaboration.

In the era of digital communication, social media platforms such as Facebook have become vital tools for government bodies to communicate with their constituents. This analysis will examine the public engagement on Facebook when the city halls of Cluj-Napoca and Constanta in Romania invite the public to citizen consultations, using 'Engagement Rate' (ER) as a metric. ER is calculated by dividing the interactions (likes, comments, and shares) by the number of fans.

The data set provides details on the Engagement Rate (ER) for posts with the keyword "Yes," indicating posts that contain only invitations to public consultations, and "No," indicating posts that do not contain such invitations (Figure 1). The ER is then broken down into mean (average), median (middle value), minimum (Min\_ER), and maximum (Max\_ER) engagement rates (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Comparison of Engagement Rates (ER) for Posts with and without the Keyword 'Public Consultation' from Cluj-Napoca and Constanta City Halls.*

City Hall	Keyword "public consultation"	Mean_ER	Median_ER	Min_ER	Max_ER
<b>Cluj-Napoca</b>	No	0.00845	0.00213	0	2.25
<b>City Hall</b>	Yes	0.00576	0.00119	0.000179	0.0870
<b>Constanta</b>	No	0.00458	0.00201	0.0000358	0.546
<b>City Hall</b>	Yes	0.00266	0.00118	0.000196	0.0198

**Source:** Own elaboration.

### Cluj-Napoca City Hall Analysis

For Cluj-Napoca City Hall, posts without public consultation invitations ("No") have a higher average ER of 0.00845 compared to posts with public consultation invitations ("Yes") which have a mean ER of 0.00576. This implies that, on average, posts without public consultation invitations tend to generate more engagement. The median ER, which gives a better measure of the typical post, given that it is not skewed by outliers, also supports this finding, with the median ER for "No" posts being 0.00213 compared to 0.00119 for "Yes" posts.

The range of ER for the "No" posts (0 to 2.25) is also wider than that of the "Yes" posts (0.000179 to 0.0870), indicating more variability in engagement with "No" posts. This could potentially mean that the "No" posts include content that is highly engaging to the audience, as suggested by the maximum ER of 2.25, significantly higher than the maximum ER for "Yes" posts.

### Constanta City Hall Analysis

For Constanta City Hall, a similar pattern is observed. The average ER for "No" posts (0.00458) is higher than the average ER for "Yes" posts (0.00266), suggesting that posts without public consultation invitations tend to generate more engagement. The median ER for "No" posts (0.00201) also exceeds that of "Yes" posts (0.00118), supporting this observation.

The range of ER for "No" posts (0.0000358 to 0.546) is wider than that of the "Yes" posts (0.000196 to 0.0198), again indicating more variability in engagement with "No" posts. The maximum ER for "No" posts in Constanta (0.546) is considerably higher than the maximum ER for "Yes" posts, indicating the presence of some highly engaging "No" posts.

The analysis suggests that posts without invitations to public consultations tend to engage more with the audience for both city halls. This could be due to several reasons. For instance, posts without such invitations might cover a wider range of topics, including those of high interest to the public, leading to higher engagement. Also, it could be that the language used in public consultation invitations is not as engaging or it might be that the audience is less interested in engaging with public consultation-related posts.

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However, despite the lower engagement rates, public consultation posts play a crucial role in promoting transparency and citizen participation in public affairs. City halls should, therefore, consider strategies to increase engagement with these posts, such as using more engaging language, incorporating visuals, or linking consultations to popular local issues.

Additionally, the high variability in the "No" posts, indicated by the wide range of ER, suggests that some topics or post types are significantly more engaging than others. Understanding the nature of these high-engagement posts could provide insights for both city halls on how to improve engagement rates across all their posts, including those inviting public consultation.

There could be various reasons why certain posts generate more engagement. For instance, posts on local events, festivals, or popular issues may be more likely to resonate with the audience, leading to higher engagement. Posts with visual content such as images or videos could also draw more attention and engagement than text-only posts. Another potential factor could be the timing of the posts, as posts published at times when more users are active on Facebook could have higher visibility and hence more engagement.

Another interesting aspect to explore is the significantly higher maximum ER for "No" posts compared to "Yes" posts for both city halls. This could be due to certain outlier posts that went viral, generating exceptionally high engagement. Understanding the factors that contributed to these posts going viral could provide valuable lessons on how to create highly engaging content.

Moreover, even though posts without public consultation invitations generally have higher engagement rates, it's crucial not to overlook the importance of public consultation posts. These posts serve a vital function by encouraging citizen participation in local governance, promoting transparency, and fostering a sense of community. Therefore, despite their lower engagement rates, these posts are essential for a healthy democratic process.

In conclusion, while it's evident that posts without public consultation invitations tend to generate higher engagement, both Cluj-Napoca and Constanta City Halls could benefit from strategies to increase engagement with public consultation posts. Such strategies could include learning from the high engagement "No" posts, using more engaging content and language, and optimizing the timing of posts. At the same time, the importance of public consultation posts in fostering citizen participation and promoting transparency should be acknowledged and valued.

### **Urban planning consultations**

This data set provides details on the ER for posts mentioning "urban planning" within public consultation announcements ("Yes") and those that do not mention "urban planning" within such announcements ("No"). The ER is further divided into mean (average), median (middle value), minimum (Min\_ER), and maximum (Max\_ER) engagement rates (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Comparison of Engagement Rates (ER) for Posts with and without the Keyword 'Urban Planning' from Public Consultations at Cluj-Napoca and Constanta City Halls.*

City Hall	Keyword "urban planning" from public consultation	Mean_ER	Median_ER	Min_ER	Max_ER
<b>Cluj-Napoca</b>	No	0.00630	0.00120	0.000179	0.0870
<b>City Hall</b>	Yes	0.00145	0.000966	0.000910	0.00247
<b>Constanta</b>	No	0.00292	0.00132	0.000196	0.0198
<b>City Hall</b>	Yes	0.00114	0.000779	0.000369	0.00325

**Source:** Own elaboration.

### Cluj-Napoca City Hall Analysis

For Cluj-Napoca City Hall, posts not mentioning "urban planning" within public consultation posts ("No") have a higher mean ER of 0.00630 compared to posts mentioning "urban planning" ("Yes"), which have a mean ER of 0.00145. This suggests that, on average, posts without "urban planning" references tend to generate more engagement. The median ER also supports this finding, with the median ER for "No" posts being 0.00120 compared to 0.000966 for "Yes" posts.

The range of ER for the "No" posts (0.000179 to 0.0870) is wider than that of the "Yes" posts (0.000910 to 0.00247), indicating more variability in engagement with "No" posts. This could potentially mean that "No" posts cover a broader range of topics that might interest the public more than "urban planning."

### Constanta City Hall Analysis

For Constanta City Hall, a similar pattern is seen. The mean ER for "No" posts (0.00292) is higher than that for "Yes" posts (0.00114), indicating that posts not mentioning "urban planning" within public consultation announcements tend to generate more engagement. The median ER for "No" posts (0.00132) also exceeds that of "Yes" posts (0.000779), reinforcing this observation.

The range of ER for "No" posts (0.000196 to 0.0198) is wider than that of the "Yes" posts (0.000369 to 0.00325), indicating a greater variability in engagement with "No" posts. This suggests the "No" posts may cover a variety of topics that engage the public more effectively than posts about "urban planning."

This analysis suggests that posts not mentioning "urban planning" within public consultation announcements tend to engage more with the audience for both city halls. This could be due to several reasons. Posts not mentioning "urban planning" might cover a wider array of topics, potentially more interesting to the public, leading to higher engagement. Conversely, "urban planning" might be perceived as a technical or specialized topic that not all citizens feel comfortable engaging with, leading to lower engagement rates.

Despite the lower engagement for posts mentioning "urban planning," these posts are crucial in informing and involving the public in important decisions about their city's

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development. To increase engagement with these posts, city halls could consider using more accessible language, providing visual aids or examples, or directly explaining how urban planning decisions could impact citizens' daily lives.

In conclusion, the analysis shows a higher engagement rate for posts not mentioning "urban planning" within public consultation announcements. Still, it's important for city halls to continue communicating on this topic, given its importance for the cities' future. Strategies to increase engagement could include making the subject more accessible and relatable to the average citizen.

## **Posts regarding urban planning**

### **Constanta City Hall Analysis**

The Facebook posts from the Constanta City Hall present a robust and active program of urban planning and public consultation. The city administration seems committed to transparency, inclusivity, and modernization, as demonstrated through the various initiatives described in the posts.

One of the key initiatives announced is the drafting of urban plans for the "Park & Ride Nord" and "Delavrancea" areas. This initiative indicates an active interest in managing the growth and development of the city in a structured manner. The public consultation process - including direct feedback via email, mail, or in person - underlines a commitment to civic engagement and transparency, reflecting the principles of democratic governance. The organization of public debate sessions further reinforces this aspect, encouraging face-to-face dialogue and fostering a sense of community involvement.

The announcement of the development of a General Urban Plan (PUG) for Constanta represents a strategic approach to urban development and planning. It suggests an understanding that the city's growth must be managed in a cohesive, well-thought-out manner, balancing the needs and interests of various stakeholders. The use of online questionnaires for public input represents an innovative, technologically up-to-date method for gathering feedback, which increases accessibility and efficiency.

The public consultation for a multi-year program called REACTIS, aimed at restoring buildings of cultural-architectural value in Constanta's historic center, underlines the city's commitment to cultural preservation. This, along with the public consultation for a local regulation on advertising, demonstrates a comprehensive approach to urban planning that considers aesthetic, cultural, and commercial factors.

Another initiative worth noting is the market consultation for organizing an architectural and urban solutions competition. This suggests a commitment to quality, innovation, and excellence, bringing together diverse perspectives and ideas for the city's development.

Constanta City Hall's commitment to transparency and public involvement is also evident in the announcement of a draft decision detailing the local urban planning regulation related to the General Urban Plan. By providing access to this document and allowing public feedback, the city administration is upholding the principles of

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transparency and public participation as stipulated by Law no. 52/2003 on decisional transparency in public administration.

The intention to transform neighborhoods built before 1989, the Mamaia resort, and the Peninsula Zone, in collaboration with World Bank urbanism specialists, signifies an ambitious vision for urban regeneration. By working with a renowned international institution, Constanta positions itself as a forward-thinking city open to best practices and global standards.

The city hall's announcements regarding the availability of urban planning documentation for various construction projects, including building an immovable property, creating a servitude path, and arranging an area from the Mamaia resort, demonstrates a commitment to openness and public involvement in all aspects of urban development.

Finally, the resolutions issued by the Technical Commission for Urbanism and Territorial Planning on various documents analyzed during a meeting underline the city's commitment to a systematic, professional approach to urban planning.

In summary, the Facebook posts of Constanta City Hall reflect a city administration that is transparent, committed to public involvement, and focused on strategic, sustainable urban development. Drawing upon the principles laid out by Pantić et al. (2021), the posts demonstrate an understanding of the importance of preserving cultural heritage, promoting aesthetic harmony, and utilizing modern technologies to facilitate public participation, even in the challenging times of a global pandemic. These initiatives represent a promising path for Constanta's future urban development, exhibiting resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity, and suggest lessons that could be beneficial for future urban and regional planning.

### **Cluj-Napoca City Hall Analysis**

Analyzing the Facebook posts of the Cluj-Napoca City Hall that mention public consultations on urban planning, we observe a consistent commitment to transparency, community engagement, and sustainable development. The posts detail several initiatives aimed at modernizing the city's infrastructure, enhancing its recreational spaces, and optimizing public services.

The first post discusses a public consultation for the Detailed Urban Plan (P.U.D) aiming to develop the Gheorghe Dima West recreational area. The plan envisions restructuring and maximizing the efficiency of public space and existing facilities, rehabilitating the infrastructure, and arranging walkways and green spaces. The main objectives include reorganizing a multi-sport field, a playground for children of various age groups, green spaces, and walkways, and modernizing the dog park. The plan also proposes the removal of existing garages and platforms to improve the urban image. The public is invited to send suggestions and observations during a specified period, illustrating the city's commitment to participatory urban planning.

The second post announces another public consultation, though the specific subject is obscured. However, the City Hall's intent to involve the public in decisions regarding

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urban planning remains evident.

The third post details the Cluj budget for the year, amounting to 353.2 million euros, an increase of 7.39% compared to 2019. The budget is presented as a tool to continuously improve the quality of life in the city. Key areas of focus include education, health, traffic decongestion, infrastructure, environment, non-polluting public transport, green spaces, arts and creative industries, and multicultural dynamism. The post also highlights the city's digitalization ambitions and its intent to consolidate Cluj's status as a powerful innovation center in Romania and Central and Eastern Europe.

The post further lists the city's most important projects, which reflect an integrated approach to urban development. These include the introduction of new trams, parking facilities, street modernizations, establishing the metropolitan belt of Cluj, rehabilitation of various sites, park developments, hospital modernizations, educational investments, waste management improvements, social programs, digital procedures, and public consultations. Each of these objectives, from infrastructure to social programs, underscores the holistic vision of the city's administration.

Overall, the City Hall's posts demonstrate a commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and participatory urban development. The emphasis on public consultations shows a dedication to democratic decision-making processes, ensuring that the views of citizens are considered in shaping the city's future. The commitment to digitalization and smart urban development aligns with the global trend towards smart urban forestry, as detailed by Nitoslawski et al. (2019). Moreover, the focus on the improvement of quality of life and enhancement of green spaces in Cluj-Napoca is a reflection of a forward-thinking, citizen-centric approach, which coincides with the push for smarter ecosystems in cities, reinforcing the findings of Nitoslawski et al. (2019).

By openly sharing their plans and objectives, Cluj-Napoca's City Hall not only enhances its transparency and accountability but also fosters trust and cooperation with the community it serves. These efforts combine to create a sustainable and livable urban environment that leverages the benefits of smart urban planning and forestry.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Over the span of a decade from 2014 to 2023, the municipalities of Constanta and Cluj-Napoca effectively capitalized on Facebook as a communicative platform for promoting citizen engagement in local governance. Despite the modest quantity of posts centered around public consultations, their strategic value lies in establishing an environment conducive to participatory governance and promoting active digital citizenship, reflecting an approach to public administration that is increasingly transparent, inclusive, and accessible. Thus, the commitment of Constanta and Cluj-Napoca City Halls to transparency, community involvement, and modernization is reflected in the analyzed posts. Their approach to public administration illustrates a holistic and inclusive view of urban development that values citizen participation, aligning with the concept of 'city-as-a-platform' as articulated by Repette et al. (2021).

Facebook's utilization as an integral communication channel by these local public administrations underscores specific advantages. The platform offers an expanded

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reach, enhances transparency, and facilitates citizen engagement, exemplifying its potential in reshaping public consultation procedures and modernizing local governance. Despite the comparatively lower engagement rates for public consultation-centric posts, these posts carry an implicit value as they spur citizens to engage in dialogues concerning public interest issues, thus having a bearing on the community's lives.

Our study unraveled a pattern of higher engagement rates for posts not explicitly calling for public consultation, highlighting the necessity for local governments to grasp social media communication dynamics, audience preferences, and subtleties influencing online participation. This knowledge can lead to practical recommendations, such as adopting engaging language, applying data visualization techniques, posting at opportune times, and diversifying content to increase audience participation and optimize communication effectiveness.

In parallel, the study acknowledges the potential of other digital tools and social networks such as Instagram and Twitter, despite the current predominance of Facebook. While these platforms might serve primarily to bolster the institutional image rather than generate public consultation data in the Romanian context, their potential as complementary or extended citizen engagement strategies should not be overlooked. Future research might include comparative analyses between municipalities or evaluation of other digital tools' effectiveness, thereby broadening our understanding of online citizen participation in different contexts.

On another note, the study has revealed an interesting pattern concerning the theme of "urban planning" which, despite its importance in city development, has demonstrated lower engagement rates. We recommend further efforts to demystify such specialized topics, making them more accessible and engaging to the public by using accessible language and visual aids, and demonstrating the direct impact of such topics on citizens' daily lives.

Continuous innovation and adaptation to changing trends and preferences are paramount for maintaining effective online citizen participation. This implies a persistent learning and improvement ethos that ensures the relevancy and efficacy of local administrations' online communication strategies. Despite the currently lower engagement rates of public consultation posts, their critical role in fostering a transparent, democratic process is irreplaceable, serving as a reminder that engagement rates should not be the sole measure of a post's success or value.

Additionally, the current study focused on quantitative indicators such as engagement rates and number of posts. However, the quality of engagement is equally, if not more, important. Future research could, therefore, investigate the nature and depth of citizen engagement in these online platforms, including the quality of comments, the type of feedback provided, and the extent to which this feedback influences local governance decisions. This would add another layer of understanding to the dynamics of digital citizen participation in local governance.

In summary, this research has emphasized the imperative role of information, consultation, and communication within Romanian local public administrations in the



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digital sphere. While the study's findings provide useful insights for refining online communication strategies, the municipalities' commitment to using Facebook as a primary online communication platform is noteworthy. The adoption and utilization of Facebook have illustrated promising potential, signifying a significant stride towards a more transparent, inclusive, and participatory local governance in the digital age.

In essence, while the present research has shed light on the role of Facebook in promoting citizen engagement in local governance in Constanta and Cluj-Napoca, there remains a vast territory of potential research areas to be explored, with the overarching aim of enhancing the democratic process in the digital sphere.

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## AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Author contributions:

**Conceptualization:** Tănase Tasente and Mari-Isabella Stan. **Methodology:** Tănase Tasente and Mari-Isabella Stan. **Software:** Tănase Tasente. **Validation:** Mari-Isabella Stan. **Formal analysis:** Mari-Isabella Stan. **Data curation:** Tănase Tasente. **Writing-Preparation of the original draft:** Mari-Isabella Stan. **Writing-Revision, and Editing:** Tănase Tasente. **Visualization:** Tănase Tasente. **Supervision:** Mari-Isabella Stan. **Project Manager:** Mari-Isabella Stan. **All authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript:** Tănase Tasente and Mari-Isabella Stan.

### AUTHORS:

**Mari-Isabella Stan:** Lecturer at Department of Administrative and Social Sciences, Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Ovidius University of Constanța, in Romania. She completed two Master's Programs: "Coastal Engineering" in 1998 and "Public Policy and Public Administration" in 2002, and received her Ph.D. degree in 2007. Research interest: coastal construction, urbanism, project management, maritime spatial planning.

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7509-4038>

**Tănase Tasente:** is a lecturer and ERASMUS coordinator at the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences at Ovidius University in Constanta. He holds a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree in

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Communication Sciences and a master's degree in European Administration, Institutions, and Public Policies. With over 100 published scientific papers and 4 authored books on institutional communication through social media and public policy strategies, the author has made significant contributions to the academic community. Additionally, he is the director of two international public relations companies, Plus Communication and International Communication & PR, where they have overseen marketing, advertising, and public relations campaigns for renowned multinational companies. His combination of academic and professional experience has equipped them with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in various fields of communication and administration.

**Orcid ID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3164-5894>

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