

# **Social Customer Relationship Management (social CRM): Sustainable relationship cultivation strategies into the social web of consumers**

**Andreea - Denisa TUDOR<sup>1</sup>**

***Abstract.** The importance of organization-customer communications has been highlighted as a crucial factor for the foundation of any well-organized business. In today's business world, technology continues to play a vital role within the business processes for management, communication, and customer service by cultivating internet-based relationships. Thus, the modern business landscape demands that organizations maintain an online presence to network with their customers. This constantly growing impact of online communication upon communication practices is posing both opportunities and challenges to organizations. Social Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM) has forced communication practitioners to reevaluate how, when and to what extent they interact with their customers. These features aid in the attraction of new clients and maintaining existing relationships. Therefore, understanding the link between social media and CRM is an important step in cultivating these internet-based relationships. This paper addresses success factors for customer relationship management and is focused on the role of specific relationship cultivation strategies and how Social CRM has enhanced or altered each mentioned relationship cultivation strategy. Every topic discussed is illustrated with current business examples from Romanian business landscape. Several examples from the banking press are used to illustrate the success/results an organization can achieve when using Social CRM to enhance customer relationship. Social Customer Relationship Management (Social CRM): Sustainable Relationship Cultivation Strategies into the Social Web of Consumers provides a broad investigation into the use of social technologies in business practices through theoretical research. This collection of reference source covers aspects of consumer behavior and relationship cultivation strategies aiming towards researchers, scholars, and practitioners in the fields of communication and management.*

***Keywords:** relationship cultivation strategies; dialogic organization development; social customer relationship management; individual ethics; organizational ethics.*

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1. Ph.D. candidate in Communication Sciences, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania, deniz@denisatudor.ro.

## **Introduction**

For years, technology has been the impetus for progress in various processes, systems, and businesses and it shows no sign of ceasing further development. Consequently, the application of technology-driven processes in CRM has become more and more common in today's business world. Today's hyperconnected digital world is forcing organizations to acquire new practices and knowledge in order to leverage business opportunities. In this paper, the topic of dialogic organization development discussed is illustrated with current business examples from Romanian business landscape. Hence, several cases from the banking press are used to illustrate the results an organization can achieve when using Social CRM to enhance customer relationship. As Facebook is the largest social network in Romania, many examples are from Facebook presence of Romanian Bank. And, for Facebook Pages Analysis, fbMonitor (Analytics and Monitoring Tool for Facebook Pages) launched as part of Zelist in May 2014, is used in order to provide statistics concerning Banking Sector presence on Facebook, types of shared content, or even engagement rates.

## **Literature review**

### ***Relationship management strategies in a hyper connected digital world***

Given the increasing pervasiveness of dialogue as a concept in public relations theories, many scholars and practitioners are more and more using terms like "dialogic" or "dialogue" to describe ethical and practical approaches. Consequently, relational and dialogic public relations management implies negotiation. Hence, this approach shifts theory from an emphasis on managing communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to one on communication as a tool for negotiating relationships (Botan, 1992; Vasquez, 1996). Furthermore, negotiation may be viewed as communication phenomena (Vasquez, 1996, p. 1). A similar perspective suggested an "adaption or negotiation" model, whereby effective public relations focus on the facilitation of a give-and-take relationship between organisations and their publics (Botan, 1997, p. 196).

Kent and Taylor (1998) describe dialogic relationships through the World Wide Web by naming the important point in this: using technology does not have to create distance between an organization and its publics. On the contrary, Internet communication can include the "personal touch"

that makes public relations effective (p. 323). Thus, when addressing the subject of online relationship building, developing or even maintaining, the *dialogic process of communication* is constantly presumed (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The principles of a dialogic public relations theory include five features: *mutuality* (the recognition of organization– public relationships); *propinquity* (the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics); *empathy* (the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests); *risk* (the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms); and *commitment* – the extent to which an organization gives itself over to interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002, pp. 24-25).

Actually, the strategies for communication to be used to create such dialogic relationships with online publics are: (1) the *dialogic loop* (which allows publics to enquire about the organization, meaning the information they need, not the information that the organization is willing to disseminate); (2) *usefulness of information* (including details about the way products are produced, how the services are delivered etc.), an essential aspect as it provides publics the possibility to express their opinion; (3) *interactivity* (updating information, interesting content or even questions) (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 328).

Furthermore, dialogic feedback can be understood as: “interactive exchanges in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified” (Carless, 2013, p. 90). While developing such forms of feedback, trust is important because of the relational, affective and emotional sides of feedback. Thus, trusting virtues such as tact, empathy, and willingness to listen can flourish positive feedbacks and soften more critical ones. For the purpose of this paper, we understand trust as one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on an investment of faith that the other is open, reliable, honest, benevolent and competent (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). All five features relate to assessment in organizational communication with online publics.

With the strategic dimension based on two-way and interactive communication, dialogical and socially responsible, the illusion of *control* is to be abandoned (Grunig, 2009) as refers to incapacity of communication practitioners to control the flow of online information. Yet, this overwhelming information flow can have a reverse effect on organizations looking to display as much public information as possible (in terms of *openness*, as a cultivation strategy) when disregarding the scope or functionalities of social networking sites (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). Additionally, social media users have become both consumers and producers and contribute dynamically to communication flow. Thus, when exploring motives of *social media usage*, the 4 C's: *Connect; Create; Consume; Control* (Hoffman & Novak, 2011) express the best the nature of social media: *free exchange of information*.

When considering different beneficial *types of relationships with publics*, research demonstrates that communal (based on long term benefits), exchange (which are most frequent) and convenantal (focusing on common good) relationships are the most searched by organizations (Men, 2012). However, in terms of *relationship cultivation and maintenance*, three strategies in particular seemed to be more relevant: disclosure, openness and transparency (Waters et al., 2009).

### ***Improving change management: dialogic organization development and social web 2.0 tools***

The exponential growth of Web 2.0 tools, and especially of social media (from blogs, Facebook and Twitter to LinkedIn and YouTube etc.), offers organizations the chance to join or to start a conversation with millions of customers around the globe anytime. To compete in such globally connected economy, effective use of tools and technology of Internet to market, advertise, and promote products or services is a necessity, whether the organization is IBM, McDonald's, or a small local business (Luther, 2011, p. 237).

The philosophy that should guide the marketing efforts of the organization, requires new techniques and practices in communication covered by *holistic marketing* concept (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 16) which recognizes that "everything matters" for marketing, and that a broader, integrated

perspective is vital. The four components of this perspective are (1) relationship marketing, (2) integrated marketing, (3) internal marketing, and (4) socially responsible marketing. Hence, this represents an organizational communication strategy exclusively centered on customers' particular needs and expectations.

Customers leverage different media for satisfying different needs. First, organization must determine its market. A market is a group of potential or current customers that have a similar need or desire (or what organization believe they will want or need) and share a common group of competitors, distribution channels, and packaging (Luther, 2011, p. 10). Strategic planning starts with the markets analysis: from what actual organizational activity to the future one (for maximum profitability). Finally, strategies of using social media need to be knitted together into an approach that spans people, processes and technology to achieve maximum customer benefits.

Many social media definitions suggest the *collaborative* attribute that it plays for an organization. For instance, social media, Internet-based tools that promote collaboration and information sharing (Junco, Helbergert & Loken, 2011) can be used in organizational settings to promote clients engagement and facilitate better organizational learning. Or, social media includes a variety of web-based tools and services that are designed to promote community development through collaboration and information sharing (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Junco, Helbergert & Loken, 2011). As social media can include blogs, wikis, sharing tools, networking platforms, and virtual worlds, this *collaborative* attribute can take many forms, such as: audio, photo, video, text.

Organizations adopting social web tools mean organizations prepared of change and willing to embrace change. The link between communications and organizational change has been attracting increasing interest, from scholars and practitioners, during the last decade (Johansson & Heide, 2008). In fact, communication has been recognized as relevant dimension to the success of organizational change. Or, even more appealing, change is a communicative challenge for formal and informal networks (Allen et al., 2007). Hence, communication within the context of change has been seen

as a way to inform, involve and even motivate collaborators to participate in the change (Caldwell, 1993).

Yet, during online participation designed to produce dialogic communication the challenge of investigating the authenticity of participation is to make the difference. Summing up, different participation processes may occur within a change implementation: (i) *dialogic participation* (where participants are considered as authentic subjects) or *monologic participation* (where participants are treated just as objects) (Jabri et al., 2008, p. 679).

### ***Communication privacy management: ethics in the participatory culture***

The unique participatory nature of social media (users can create, respond to, and share content) has had important impact on the way people use media. More time is spent on social media than on any other online activity (Nielsen, 2012). Bombarded with large streams of information, the individual is actually trying to ease the way to *communicate* by using emails, text messages, chat rooms, online forums, online social networks and other virtual surroundings. Currently *social media usage* plays an important role in communication initiatives to build community. As expected, the rise of social media systems quickly turned the web into a platform of lively discussions and debates (Weinberger, 2011).

Still, participatory culture implies a proactive behaviour on behalf of individuals who are now fulfilling roles of both pertaining production and consumption processes, but not unquestionably in an equal manner (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). In fact, *free exchange of information* implies: (1) *dialogue* and (2) *transparency*, components of effective organization-public relationships. However, the circulation of media content directly and necessarily depends on “consumer’s active participation” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Yet, access issues have grown in importance for all SNS users (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Previous research shows that incorporating others either without any restrictions or allowing only certain categories of people to access an SNS profile and postings is the most common way people utilize an SNS to manage disclosures (Lenhart, 2009; Madden et al., 2007).

Still, there are various ways in which people tend to manage protection of their private information when using social network sites. For some of them, privacy boundaries are very thick, restricting access. For others, their privacy boundaries are very open, allowing high permeability. There are also those who slide between these two extremes depending on their needs, thus adjusting access as necessary (Petronio, 2002).

In defining social network site (SNS), boyd and Ellison (2008) mention three criteria (1) construction of a profile in a system that can be bounded or restricted if desired, (2) inclusion of others with whom they share some type of connection, and finally (3) viewership and surfing capabilities among the list of contacts if desired. As boyd (2014) later emphasized when discussing *privacy* and *publicity* (which were to play crucial roles in the development of social media) individuals care quite deeply about privacy and control.

In this respect, Communication Privacy Management (CPM) represents an evidence-based theory about how people manage private information (Petronio, 2002). Thus, CPM stipulates *five principles* about the privacy management for better understand of both the times when access to the information is granted and when access is denied. The *first principle* states that individuals equate their private information with personal possessions (Child et al., 2009). The *second principle* predicts that because people believe they own their information, they also believe that they have the right to control the flow of the information to others. *Principle three* predicts that people develop and use privacy rules to control the flow of information to others (Petronio, 2002). *Principle four* predicts that once private information is disclosed or others are granted access, the information moves from individual ownership to collective ownership. The *fifth principle* concerns the prediction that if owners and co-owners do not coordinate the privacy rules to regulate information flow, disruption will occur and boundary turbulence will result.

Moreover, even though access and transparency mean permanent information availability, information does not equal communication or vice-versa (Jahansoozi, 2005). Additionally, by using the information processing perspective, public relations professionals engage in: (1) *information assembling* — constructing “frames of information” for these

publics; (2) *information promotion* — making this frames of information known to key publics and (3) *information consuming* — to determine information content or to gain feedback (Vasquez 1996, pp. 71-72). Thus, at an organizational level, SNS activation can help organizations manage their resources strategically; enabling individuals both (1) to locate useful information and (2) to contribute to the internal network by using social networking sites (Steinfeld et al., 2009).

### ***Social Customer Relationship Management into the social web of consumers***

The *approach of social media and customer dialog management* confines usage to a *specific* area, such as customer service. With the advent of social media, customer relationship management (CRM) is even more important to organizations today, as they strive to keep their customers from “straying” to opposing organizations.

The millions of users linked from all over the world (though social media) can be translated (at the organizational level) into *all level of consumers*. On one hand, social media works as an effective CRM, giving organizations the opportunity to talk with their clients. On the other hand, social media for customer dialog is definitely related to the impact of social media on consumer behavior, as social media has influenced consumer behavior from information acquisition to post-purchase behavior such as dissatisfaction statements or behaviors about a product or a organization (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Technology gives consumer the power to investigate products and services) and criticize them (if having reasons).

Social media can make it much easier for organization the process of learning about their customers. Correspondingly, organizations should find out what their consumers would like to hear, or talk about, and what they might find interesting, enjoyable, and valuable. Then, the organization should go about developing and posting content that fits those expectations (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 66).

Social CRM (SCRM), the combination of social media and CRM (Woodcock et al., 2011, p. 52), is very individually focused, therefore: (1) it is important to make the consumers feel that they are important to your



organization (as CRM deals with building trust) and (2) it supports the whole customer lifecycle, and should lead to increased sales and decreased costs if implemented correctly (Woodcock et al., 2011, p. 55).

Clients' engagement through social media can increase connections to create a virtual community which leads to better content sharing. Due to the advantages of social media in connecting businesses directly to end-consumers, in a timely manner and at a low cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), a great influence on customer perceptions and behaviors has been noticed (Williams and Cothrell, 2000). As a consequence, social media use for customer dialog has been brought in the center of attention in different industries in the last few years.

### ***The impact of connectedness on loyalty and retention strategies***

As shown so far, social media can be seen as activity and practice between human groups who share information, knowledge and opinion online. This interactive media improves connectedness between members of the groups. Thus, considering Web 2.0 a set of online application controlled by users (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008), discussing the impact of connectedness on loyalty and retention strategies drawn by organizations is essential. In fact, the impact on loyalty and retention stays, mainly, in the *controlled* aspect of Web 2.0.

While CRM is defined as a process which helps in profiling prospects, understanding their needs, and in building relationships with them by providing the most suitable products and enhanced customer service, SCRM (the combination of social media and CRM) is described as the business strategy of engaging customers through social media with the goal of building trust and brand loyalty (Woodcock et al., 2011, p. 52).

An important step in the CRM process is that of retaining consumers. In fact, retaining customers is the prerequisite for learning and building relationships with them (Kierzkowski et al., 1996). Social media offers organizations the opportunity to learn about the customer they are talking to. In this way, the organizations that are using SCRM are able to provide interesting and valuable content on social media sites – an important tactic for retaining customers (Chan & Guillet, 2011, p. 365). Furthermore,

beyond the building relationships with customers, there is a strong correlation between high customer-retention rates and sustainable profits (Murphy et al., 2003, p. 73), which justifies why social media should be considered a key element in CRM.

Developing and cultivating relationship strategies on Web 2.0 brought many researches to life, researches that are important to knowledge in the field. However, researches can be carried out in a number of ways (depending, amongst other reasons, on the methodology and the purpose of the paper). In this respect, social network site (SNS), with their specific features and functionalities, should be approached differently when conducting a research. Considering the potential of *social media* in harnessing effective and positive relationships based on interactivity and engagement between organizations and their publics, this paper focuses on identifying how Romanian banks (those who are present on Facebook, as the world's biggest social network) are developing collaborative partnership with their publics and whether specific cultivation strategies (such as openness and interactivity) used when online communicating, are enhancing and building genuine relationships by creating consumer experiences (Social CRM).

### **Research questions**

Developing and cultivating relationship strategies on Web 2.0 brought many researches to life, researches that are important to knowledge in the field. Researches can be carried out in a number of ways (depending, amongst other reasons, on the methodology and the purpose of the paper). In this respect, Facebook pages, with their specific features and functionalities, should be approached differently when conducting a research. Considering the potential of Facebook activity in harnessing effective and positive relationships based on interactivity and engagement between banks and their publics, this paper focuses on identifying how the most active Romanian banks on Facebook are developing collaborative partnership with their publics and whether specific cultivation strategies (such as usefulness of information and interactivity) used on Facebook, are enhancing and building genuine relationships by creating consumer experiences.

Therefore, the case is represented by the most visible (in terms of interactivity and online response rate) social media actions driven by Romanian banks on their Facebook Pages and the research questions of the paper are:

R1: How Romanian banks build online relationship through their Facebook Pages activity?

R2: Do the negotiated meanings and expectations are clarified as the base of the interactive exchanges?

### **Methodology**

This research is based on a qualitative case study on Romanian banks with active presence on Facebook, as the largest social network by number of users (with more than 7,200,000 active accounts in Romania according Facebrands.ro, accessed on 18 June 2014). Therefore, the case is determined by the most visible (in terms of interactivity and online response rate) social media actions driven by Romanian banks on their Facebook Pages (from 1 May 2014 to 13 July 2014). Given the fact that the research is based on specific online statistics concerning activities on Facebook, offered by fbMonitor (Analytics and Monitoring Tool for Facebook Pages), a tool launched as part of Zelist in May 2014, the above mentioned period of conducting the research is justified. Thus, several relevant social media actions from the banking are used to illustrate the results an organization can achieve when using Social CRM to enhance customer relationship. When analyzing the selected banking social media actions we looked out for the connection between that specific shared content and the bank's product. In doing so, we were investigating ways in which Romanian banks are developing relationships by creating consumer experiences (Social CRM). Moreover, this customer experience can be seen as an opportunity for insight and shaping new markets. Besides this investigation of the most visible Facebook posts (from 1 May 2014 to 13 July 2014), the rebranding campaign of ABN Amro Bank from 2009 (a campaign which received at that time PR Golden Award for Excellence) is discussed as an example of strategically managed resources at organizational level (Praward.ro, 2009).

As we are interested in looking at the same issue (the most visible social media actions driven by Romanian banks on their Facebook Pages), but

we were intrigued by the different online relationship strategies driven by banks when posting on their Facebook Pages, then a holistic case study with embedded units enables us to explore the case while considering the influence of the various strategies and associated attributes on the audience's decision making (Social CRM). Therefore, we look at sub-units (see Code Book: Measuring Online Relationship Cultivation Strategies) that are situated within the larger case in three steps: (1) data is analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), (2) data is analyzed between the different subunits (between case analysis), and (3) across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis).

The units of analysis of this research paper were firstly the Facebook pages (as a mark on Romanian banks social media presence) and, mainly, specific Facebook posts (statuses and shares) by banks pages. The sample of specific Facebook posts selected have in common the large visibility gained (as they are the most visible ones from the mention period of analysis), but, interestingly, this case analysis investigate the differences that operates between them.

## **Results**

*R1: How Romanian banks build online relationship through their Facebook Pages activity?*

Addressing *online communication* while building relationship though Facebook, Romanian banking sector generated in May 2014 nearly 13,000 online appearances via owned Facebook pages, with 24% fewer than in April, and a viewership of over 24 million. Furthermore, network visibility in banking increased from the previous month on blogs and forums with 1%, but decreased both in online media by 29% and social networks by 18%. (IQads.ro, 2014) In Romania, Facebook is the largest social network by number of users with more than 7.200.000 active accounts (Facebrands.ro, 2014). Hence, Romania ranks the top 35 countries in the world by number of users, according to data provided by Facebrands.ro and Quintly.com (Wall-street.ro, 2013). Thinking of these active users in terms of potential audience for banking sector, 60% of them are young

people aged 18-34 years (*idem*). In this respect, banks efforts invested in growing Facebook Pages is justified.

A brief activity overview in Romanian Banks (see Figure 1 in Annex 1) shows for 7-13 July 2014 increasing rates for *Fans Interaction* and *Average Response*. Moreover, concerning the type of content shared by banks on Facebook (for the above mentioned period), *Text Content* is the most shared one (Total Posts: 107, Total Links: 25, Total Statuses: 21), followed by *Video Content* (Total Photos: 57, Total Videos: 4). These figures show banks inclination towards a type of online communication that involves creating content, rather than sharing an existing one.

In addition, when considering the second and third criteria mentioned by boyd and Ellison (2008) in defining social network sites (see *Communication Privacy Management: Individual and Organizational Ethics in the Participatory Culture*) for banking sector communication, from a Fan Base of 1,205,859 for 7-13 July 2014, only 8,444 are *Active Fans*, and, more specifically, just 39 represent *Super Fans* (see Figure 1 in Annex 1). Thus, having a *Fan Base* on any social network site does not assure the interaction and create, by default, an active community around the brand.

Curiously, the findings about online communication of Romanian banking sector actors for the last two years represented a period of consistent actions and different trials effectuated by Romanian banks in order to attract their online publics. Hence, the connection between *improving change management* and *social web 2.0 tools* (see *Improving change management: Dialogic Organization Development and Social Web 2.0 tools*) can be expressed by two representative examples. One example is *Facebook Log Out Experience Campaign* made by BCR (see Figure 2 in Annex 2) which had a great impact (see Figure 3 in Annex 3), being the first such Facebook campaign launched in Romania. Another example to be mentioned here is the case of Banca Transilvania who enabled the service of sending money to the loved one though your Facebook account (Dailybusiness.ro, 2013). All you need is to have a Banca Transilvania active account and a Facebook Account. A Facebook account is so easy to have (more than 7.200.000 romanians already have one), so *make a Banca Transilvania account* – could be the “backstage campaign message”. This

later example is well expressing the banks initiative to get closer to their clients. As a bank representative suggested, this type of service was created as a belief in the correlation between banking and technology, as in the future the alternative channels will cover much of the traditional ones area. (Dailybusiness.ro, 2013) Also, Banca Transilvania has launched two other facilities: money transfers via SMS and email (Dailybusiness.ro, 2013). Thus, giving clients the opportunity to choose the facility that is at hand.

Moreover, SNS activation at an organizational level (in the context of information and networked society) can help organizations manage their resources strategically (Steinfeld et al, 2009); being a useful tool in bridging internal and external publics of the organization. Hence, an appropriate example of strategically managed resources at organizational level is the case of ABN Amro Bank rebranding campaign from 2009 when it became RBS Romania, a campaign which received at that time PR Golden Award for Excellence (Praward.ro, 2009). This campaign engaged both internal and external publics through the following communication channels distribution: (1) *internal communication*: local network Intranet, E-mail, Insite – international network intranet, face to face meetings and special events and (2) *external communication*: special events for the three target audiences in the campaign (employees; the press; existing and prospective corporate and retail clients), print, online, radio, TV, one to one meetings with the press, press release. Interestingly, the online component in this rebranding campaign took part on both levels: internal and external and completed the media mix.

With the concept of *mutual trust* (Woodcock et al., 2011, p. 53) in mind, in Romanian banking sector, players on Facebook are the most important banks (see Figure 4 in Annex 4). Interestingly, from the 8.444 *Active Fans* for 7-13 July 2014 (see Figure 1 in Annex 1), ING Web Cafe (top 1 player for the period mentioned above) has almost half of these active fans, more specifically: 4.123 *Active Fans* (see Figure 4 in Annex 4), followed by Garanti Bank with 2.059 *Active Fans*. Furthermore, looking at engagement figures by days (see Figure 4 in Annex 4), we can easily notice that Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and even Friday are the most interactive days of the week.

When analyzing loyalty and retention strategies through Facebook pages by Romanian banks we first look at the top content (see Figure 5 in Annex 5) in order to highlight the types of content that engage users and, secondly, to look out for the connection between them and the bank's products. Hence, the most visible and the one with the greatest engagement rate is the status provided by Garanti Bank where users are invited to write down in a comment who they think will win the World Cup 2014 and they can win a shopping voucher of 200 Lei (see Figure 5 in Annex 5).

Concerning this status, above analyzed, more than the strategies for communication practitioners to engage client in conversation, we talk about contextual framing as a starting point of online discourse by making the significance of the publication date (around the World Cup 2014) the reason of the status itself and giving users the chance to win shopping money. Contextual frames are presumably built up through real-world experiences, and subsequently influence how we perceive and predict the social world (Levanthal & Scherer, 1987; Bar, 2004). Hence, contextual framing enhances the impact of the message. Moreover, contexts may also operate as nodes by which common events are organized in memory (Anderson & Bower, 1972; Bar & Aminoff, 2003). What is the connection of this type of contest organized by banks with the bank's products? Clearly, there is no direct connection, but, at the same time, would be difficult for a bank to directly, promote its products. Thus, the link with bank's products is assured by the presence of money, as money represent the direct indicator when talking about banks. Furthermore, the second most visible content for the mentioned period came from ING Web Cafe (see Figure 6 in Annex 6). This time the content refers to a *Text Content* with *Link* (as the categories mentioned in Figure 1 in Annex 1) and refers to a urban project that the bank is supporting. What is the connection of this type of content with the bank's products? None. This type of content expresses the ING Bank social interest for the community well-being, as part of this community along with its clients (online users).

*R2: Do the negotiated meanings and expectations are clarified as the base of the interactive exchanges?*

Given the purpose of this paper, interestingly, the most visible Facebook posts by Romanian banks, in May 2014, had different approaches and messages (see Figure 6 in Annex 6 and Figure 7 in Annex 7). They come from ING Web Café and Garanti Bank. On one hand, first one represents a status based on contextual framing, created by making the significance of the publication date (1<sup>st</sup> May - International Workers' Day, a national public holiday in Romania) the reason of the status itself, as follows: *"We love International Workers's Day almost as much as the work itself"* Afterwards, as the contextual framing is assured, the status announces how ING Web Café thought to celebrate with their online public the International Workers' Day: *"Guess all jobs in the picture until Saturday, May 3 at 20:00, and you can win a voucher of 100 Lei to use it in Carturesti bookstore. The first person correctly listing all occupations in the picture and posting the answer as a comment on this picture will be awarded (in case no one guesses all occupations, the prize will go to the first person who found most occupations). Edited answers will not be counted. Good luck!"* (see Figure 1 in Annex 1) Hence, ING Web Café greets its online public with an interesting and updated content by asking them to play the guessing game. As the case of Garanti Bank status (mentioned in the first part of this section) (see Figure 5 in Annex 5), where users are invited to write down in a comment who they think will win the World Cup 2014, this status is also based on contextual framing, created by making the significance of the publication date (around the *International Workers's Day*). Thus, while the first post (see Figure 1 in Annex 1) received 1093 likes, 72 shares and 226 comments, the second one (see Figure 2 in Annex 2) is just half of the results, naming: 667 likes, 19 shares and 43 comments.

Concerning negotiated meanings and expectations clarified as the base of interactive exchanges (D. Carless, 2013, p. 90), ING Web Café in the above analyzed status offers both contest rules participation in mentioned competition and the mechanism of interaction for people interest in participating.

On the other hand, the latter represents a status which communicates one Garanti Bank employee success in the Romanian business environment, as follows: *"Our colleague, Anca Motca, Deputy General Manager of Garanti Bank, last night won one of the ten prizes awarded for best performing young managers in the Romanian business environment. Congratulations, Anca, we*



*are proud that you are part of our team! More details on Ziarul Financiar: <http://bit.ly/1jUwAtf>.”* (see Figure 7 in Annex 7).

Addressing the subject of critical and softened feedback (*idem*), on Garanti Bank status above mentioned (see Figure 7 in Annex 7), one of the 43 comments brings into question a problem that one client is experiencing with a Garanti Bank employee, as follows: “*CONGRATULATIONS! Dear Madam I am a faithful Garanti Bank client who has a problem with headquarters Rotondo in Craiova: the director and an employee Cristina who is not involved in my problems at all. I please ask seriousness if not from their part, at least from yours. Regards.*” Thus, this represents an appropriate example of bank’s willingness to be vulnerable to their clients and a situation that needs to be properly managed and give a solution to the client’s complaint.

Again, referring to the reaction to Garanti Bank status, it expresses well this abandoned illusion of *control* suggested by Grunig (2009) as an indicator for organizational online communication accumulating the strategic dimension based on two-way and interactive communication. Hence, the web turned into a platform of lively discussions and debates (D. Weinberger, 2011) made possible the interaction of one Garanti Bank client having problems with specific employee, as discussed above (see Figure 7 in Annex 7).

### **Limitations of the research**

This research can serve as a pilot study for investigating the ways banks from Romanian landscape are using Facebook pages in order to develop relationship cultivation strategies with their customer and other larger publics. Other possible research topics could include investigating the internal and external use of social network sites by banks. In this respect, one of the main methodological limitations of this research is the sample size which is not large enough to ensure a representative a set of conclusive results.

Given the purpose of this paper: identifying how Romanian banks present on Facebook are developing collaborative partnership with their publics

and whether specific cultivation strategies (such as usefulness of provided information and interactivity) used when online communicating, are enhancing and building genuine relationships by creating consumer experiences (Social CRM), the measure used to collect the data could have inhibited researcher's ability to conduct a thorough analysis of the results. In retrospect, a quantitative analysis researching a significant sample of Facebook Pages could have given new dimensions to the results of the study.

### **Discussions**

As shown so far, social media websites provide an opportunity for businesses to engage and interact with potential consumers, encourage an increased sense of intimacy with consumers, and build all important relationships with potential consumers. (Mersey et al., 2010) Many organizations started out with basic online communication offer for their clients, such as creating social media accounts and pages, than creating content, and have now graduated to playing the role of social media consultants for themselves. The evaluation and continuous monitoring of *social media activity* help companies converse in the proper context with the right audience and close business with customers. Importance of evaluation for insights and shaping new markets is crucial.

Moreover, through the use of SCRM a company can get to know their high value customers, and then proceed to market accordingly to those customers (Woodcock et al., 2011, p . 56). In fact, this creates a sense of trust between organization and the consumer, and it can also lead to shaping new markets. Many companies have turned to social media for help in understanding who they are interacting with, what users like and how to create communication to reach out to the right audience. Besides shaping entry strategies in new markets, by using SCRM organizations mine millions of real-time social media conversations to identify top influencers in their segment of interest. In fact, analyzing the volume of direct conversations around specific topics or about topics that are related could be, also, a technique of gathering information in order to get directions in shaping entry strategies in new markets. Not only companies are using conversations on social media platforms to shape entry strategies

in new markets, these *new markets* also could mean new country (if considering the mobility facilitated by *social media*).

For instance, the two new services driven by Banca Transilvania, namely: (1) the service of sending money to the loved one through your Facebook account (Dailybusiness.ro, 2013) and (2) money transfers via SMS and email (Dailybusiness.ro, 2013) represent clear actions of SCRM techniques used to contribute to retention and loyalty of customers.

Merely being present on social media is no longer sufficient for those banks that are looking for help in decoding social chatter for business gain. These banks are using insights gained from efficient results (called *conversations*) on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms to shape entry strategies in new markets, and communicate directly with target groups.

Social media are truly all about conversations, that's why banks need to create targeted communication, ideally creating the feeling for the customer of being in a one-on-one relationship with the bank.

## **Conclusions**

The main purpose of this study was to identify how Romanian banks (those who are present on Facebook, as the world's biggest social network) are developing collaborative partnership with their publics and whether specific cultivation strategies (such as usefulness of provided information and interactivity) used when online communicating, are enhancing and building genuine relationships by creating consumer experiences (Social CRM). As Social CRM is about information, leverage, connections, conversations, discovery, and amplification, the paper focuses on specific communication strategies for cultivating and maintaining organizational-public relationship (OPR), such as *openness* and *interactivity*. In this respect, this study was focused on identifying if banks use specific relationship cultivation strategies on their Facebook Pages in order to enhance customer relationship.

As a synthesis of the results, Romanian banks use Facebook Pages in order to be close to their customers (in terms of being present where they are), not with the first purpose in mind of communicating their services and/or products. Moreover, social media acts like a real-time support in understanding banking customers and addressing their needs, either for retention or loyalty programs (see the cases of the two new services introduced by Banca Transilvania in 2013).

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**Code Book: Measuring Online Relationship Cultivation Strategies**

<b>Unit of analysis: Facebook post</b>
--

<b>Organization name: Fill in the bank name - first 4 letters</b>
---

**1. Facebook administration rules for writing on the Page wall:**

1 – Only admins are allowed to post

0 – Fans are allowed too

<b>Facebook Post characteristics and the generated visibility</b>
---

**2. Type of post:**

1 - News

2 - Reports

3 - Press Releases/Events

4 - Campaigns

5 - Polls/Questionnaires

6 - Multimedia (taken from other sources)

7- Multimedia (original)



- 8 - Links to website
- 9 - Simple text article
- 10 - Promotion/prizes

**3. Indicate the nature of analyzed Facebook post:**

- 1 – Update related to the banking products and/or services
- 2 – Update related to a CSR campaign the bank is part in
- 3 – Update with online audience oriented message (with no relation to the banking products and/or services)

**4. No. of likes**

- 0 - 0 likes
- 1 - Between 1-49
- 2 - Between 50-99
- 3 - Between 100-199
- 4 - Between 200-499
- 5 - More than 500

**5. No. of comments**

- 0 - 0 comments
- 1- Between 1-49
- 2 - Between 50-99
- 3 - Between 100-199
- 4 - Between 200-499
- 5 - More than 500

**6. No. of shares**

- 0 - 0 shares
- 1 - Between 1-49
- 2 - Between 50-99
- 3 - Between 100-199
- 4 - Between 200-499
- 5- More than 500

### **7. Disclaimer (negotiated meanings and expectations clarified as the base of the interactive exchanges)**

3 - High: Provides a consistent guideline/disclaimer within the Facebook post with rules of interaction with the bank and other users on the Facebook (the mechanism of interaction for people interest in participating).

2 - Medium: Provides a short guideline/disclaimer with rules of interaction with the bank and other users via a link within the Facebook post

1 - Low: Provides some rules of interaction within the Facebook post

0 - Not available: Does not provide any disclaimers.

<h2><b>Relationship strategies on Web 2.0</b></h2>
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### *Openness*

#### **8. Usefulness of information**

3 - High: The Facebook post provides detailed information about subject it addresses and users need it it

2 - Medium: The Facebook post provides detailed information about subject it addresses

1 - Low: The Facebook post provides little information about subject it addresses

0 - Not available: The Facebook post represents just a share from other pages or Facebook users

### *Interactivity*

#### **9. Originality**

3 - High: The Facebook Post content is entirely original, fully created by the bank (even and multimedia part: image and/or video).

2 - Medium: The Facebook Post content is partly original (multimedia part: image and/or video is not created by the bank).

1 - Low: Most multimedia is taken from third party sources, but the post includes some originality.

0 - Not available: The entire Facebook Post content is taken from other sources.

#### **10. Immediacy of response**

3 - High: Users` comments are answered immediately after they were posted.

2 - Medium: Users` comments are answered within the same day of their posting

1 - Low: Users` comments are answered the next days after their posting.

0 - Not available: Users` comments are not being answered.

**11. *Dialogue stimulation***

3 - High: The Facebook Post incentivizes users to respond to questions or to take part to contest driven by the bank.

2 - Medium: The Facebook Post incentivizes to respond to general question (with no contest part included)

1 - Low: The Facebook Post incentivizes (calls-to-responses) users to answer to a short question (being provided no multimedia content)

0 - Not available: The Facebook Post does not provide any feature to collect information from the users/ let the user express his opinion.

**12. *Human Voice***

3 - High: The administrator (or administrators) of the page reveal their name when responding to users. Their contact details and full name of the people who administrate the page are provided at the Contact section

2 - Medium: The administrator (or administrators) of the Facebook Page reveal their name when responding to users

1 - Low: The administrator (or administrators) provide their contact details in the Contact section, but still use their brands` name when interacting with other users on the page.

0 - Not available: The organizational voice is constantly present, without any name of an administrator

Annexes  
ANNEX 1



Figure 1. Activity Overview on Facebook in Romanian banking sector (fbMonitor - <http://www.zelist.ro/fb/domains/banci>)

ANNEX 2

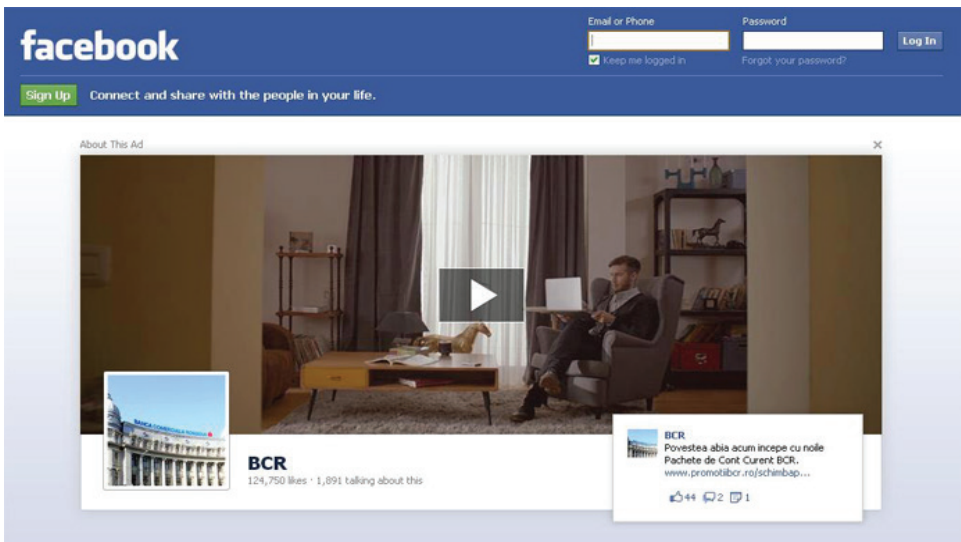
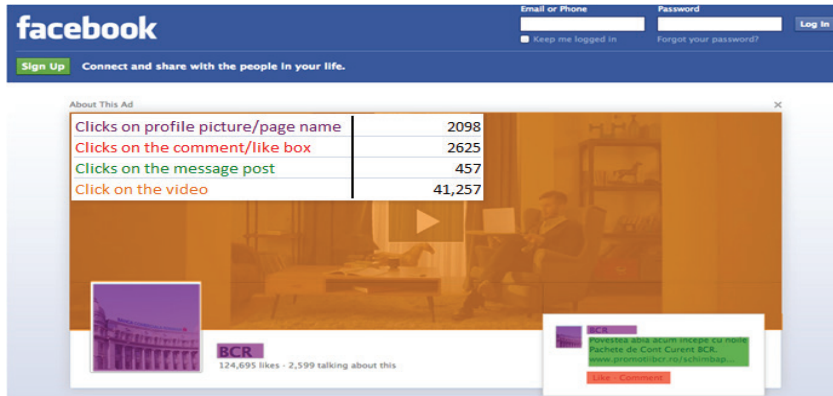


Figure 2. BCR Facebook Logout Experience Campaign in Romania (<http://marketing20.ro/rezultatele-primeii-campanii-facebook-logout-experience.html>)

ANNEX 3



**Figure 3. Results of BCR Facebook Logout Experience Campaign**  
 (<http://marketing20.ro/rezultatele-primii-campanii-facebook-logout-experience.html>)

ANNEX 4

**TopPlayers** in Banks

Top Players	Talking	Active
ING Web Café	4377	4123
Garant! Bank	3513	2059
Wata Fara CASH	1683	1372
Plaeus Bank Romania	1506	592
BRD Groupe Societe Generale	611	204
BCR	454	202
Banca Transilvania	307	190
Bancpost	226	54
Ralfelsen Bank Romania	168	52
UniCreditTiriacBank	98	35

Day	Posts	Likes	Comm	Shares
Mon	21	529	17	8
Tue	18	1552	1401	338
Wed	17	3646	21	89
Thu	15	838	7	10
Fri	16	1805	15	70
Sat	9	143	3	0
Sun	11	550	10	8

"Posts" by time of day	
morning (6-12)	39
after noon (12-18)	48
evening (18-24)	20
nights (24-6)	0

Figure 4. Top Players on Facebook in Romanian banking sector (fbMonitor - <http://www.zelist.ro/fb/domains/banci>)ANNEX 5

### TopContent *in Banks*



Participa la concurs si castiga un voucher de cumparaturi in valoare de 200 lei. Spune-ne intr-un comentariu ce echipa va castiga Cupa Mondiala si daca ai ghicit premiul poate fi al

Garanti Bank



Poveste Urbana - Scrie istoria caselor din jurul tau! Descopera povestile caselor vechi si contribuie si tu la cel mai frumos ghid urban pentru smartphone. [povesturbana.gandul.info](http://povesturbana.gandul.info)

ING Web Café



Implinim 20 de ani si cautam Inaltatori de Zmeie de varsta noastra! Daca ai o idee de afaceri/proiect/pasiune pentru antreprenoriat cultural, design, ecoturism, arhitectura si tehnologie

ING Web Café



Cu Viata fara CASH esti mai aproape de orice experienta de relaxare pe care ti-o doresti. Plateste de cel putin 5 ori prin oricare dintre metodele Smart Banking si poti castiga masina

Viata Fara CASH



Intra acum in Colectia de experiente si raspunde la provocarea Lunii cu o super experienta pe care o poti castiga pe Viata fara CASH!  
[https://facebook.com/ViataFaraCash/app\\_6992466401](https://facebook.com/ViataFaraCash/app_6992466401)

Viata Fara CASH



Participa la crearea celei mai tari colectii de experiente care se pot castiga pe Viata fara CASH si o tableta Samsung Galaxy Tab poate fi a ta!  
[https://facebook.com/ViataFaraCash/app\\_6992466401](https://facebook.com/ViataFaraCash/app_6992466401)

Viata Fara CASH

Figure 5. Top Content on Facebook in Romanian banking sector (fbMonitor - <http://www.zelist.ro/fb/domains/banci>)



## ANNEX 7



*667 like-uri, 19 share-uri, 43 comentarii*

**Figure 7. The most popular Facebook Post on Garanti Bank Facebook Page in May 2014 (IQAds.ro - <http://www.iqads.ro/articol/29892/cele-mai-populare-postari-de-pe-facebook-ale-brandurilor-de-banci-si-asigurari>)**

“Most popular posts by Banks and Insurance brands on Facebook in May 2014”

Status translation:

*Our colleague, Anca Motca, Deputy General Manager of Garanti Bank, last night won one of the ten prizes awarded for best performing young managers in the Romanian business environment. Congratulations, Anca, we are proud that you are part of our team! More details on Ziarul Financiar: <http://bit.ly/1jUwAtf>”*