

# SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN MUNICIPALITIES IN LATVIA

Biruta SLOKA

*University of Latvia, Aspazijas blvd. 5, Riga*

Biruta.sloka@lu.lv

Kate LASE

*University of Latvia, Aspazijas blvd. 5, Riga*

Biruta.sloka@lu.lv

Mārcis VĪTOLS

*University of Latvia, Aspazijas blvd. 5, Riga*

Biruta.sloka@lu.lv

## **Abstract**

*Social media use in municipalities has expanded around the world on the basis of development of internet and technology. Although each social network offers substantial benefits and opportunities to municipalities, research of social media use in municipalities in Latvia remains scant. Purpose of the study is to analyse how much and which social media use municipalities in Latvia. Research methods used in preparation of the paper: recent scientific publication studies, analysis of social media of municipalities of Latvia, survey on social media use in municipalities in Latvia realized on April 2021. For data analysis there were used indicators of descriptive statistics: indicators of central tendency or location (arithmetic mean, mode, median, quartiles), indicators of variability (variance, standard deviation, standard error of mean), cross – tabulations, statistical tests of hypotheses and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Findings show that 13 of 119 municipalities of Latvia lack of social media. The results of the research can provide valuable pointers for decision makers how to improve social media administration in municipalities in Latvia.*

**Keywords:** Digital marketing, internet, municipalities, social media

**JEL classification:** M14; M38

## **Introduction**

As social media increasingly becomes part of everyday life, more municipalities are carving out social media presence online. Municipalities needs to be more open and transparent about its activities and social networking can help in evolving more inclusive governing model where municipality not only spread awareness of its activities and plans, but also engage in a communication with citizens.

Taking into account all mentioned before, the purpose of the study is to analyse how much and which social media use municipalities in Latvia.

In order to achieve the purpose, the tasks are formulated as follows:

1. to review theoretical background of social media use in municipalities;
2. to review existing research of social media analysis in municipalities in the regions in EU;
3. to analyse social media use in municipalities of Latvia;
4. to analyse survey “Social media use in municipalities in Latvia” results.

Research methods used: scientific publication and previous conducted research results analysis, analysis of social media of municipalities of Latvia, analysis of survey “Social media use in municipalities in Latvia” results. For statistical data analysis there are used main indicators of descriptive statistics (arithmetic means, standard deviations and standard error of means), analysis of variance (ANOVA) for testing differences of arithmetic means by six independent characteristics – and needs of financial support for inhabitants.

## **Literature Review**

Social media offers a variety of opportunities for all types of organizations. The main benefits of their use for municipalities are communication with the public and transparency of municipal activities. However, despite these benefits, research shows that municipalities do not make sufficient use of social media. A study on the use of social media in municipalities found that the dominant social network used by municipalities in the United States is Facebook and the content posted on Facebook and Twitter is very similar, and most often it is information about events. This means that most municipalities tend to post one-way content in their social networks, which is also easier and more understandable, but at the same time less engaging and does not form a dialogue with the municipality (Graham, Avery, 2013). Those aspects are analysed also in other fields (Batraga, et al, 2018 a; Batraga, et al, 2018 b). A study on the use of social networks in the world's largest cities found that Twitter, Youtube and Facebook are the most used by public authorities, followed by Google+, LinkedIn and Instagram. But the least used are blogs like Flickr, Tumblr, and Pinterest (Mainka, et.al., 2015). The study in Germany analyzed a number of social networks, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and concluded that both photos and videos facilitate communication between the municipality and the public. Trends showed that people prefer leisure-related topics (Hofmann, et.al., 2015). With regard to the social network Instagram, there is practically no research in the scientific literature that focuses on how this social platform is used by municipalities (Pittman, Reich, 2016). The scientific literature is a study of how Instagram is used by politicians in their political campaigns (Bellido-Perez, Barragan-Romero, 2020). In Spain, on the other hand, a study was carried out to analyze how municipalities use the social network Instagram as a means of communication to communicate with their citizens. The study identified the main determinants of municipal activity in this channel and the determinants of population responses. The study showed that in the region of

Andalusia, which has 29 municipalities, Instagram accounts are maintained by 17 municipalities, and found that those municipalities with high debts do not maintain or actively use Instagram. As a result, it was concluded that the quality of news content is more important than the number of followers (Perea, Bonson, Bednrova, 2021).

Social network Instagram is based on sharing pictures, while social network Facebook combines both of these tools and more (Pittman, Reich, 2016). The study in Sweden analyzed the social media activity of 290 Swedish municipalities. In Sweden, as in Latvia, municipal elections are held every four years. As a result of the research, it was concluded that the use of social media in local governments is slow or non-existent, which is related due to possible legal risks. Such conclusions could also be related to the fact that in Sweden municipalities are grouped by location, for example in the following groups: large cities, suburbs, tourism and travel industry municipalities, production municipalities, sparsely populated municipalities, etc. The study also emphasizes that the official Facebook page of the municipality alone is not enough if there is no employee who manages it. Although it is difficult to identify specific or even best practices on how to do this, some activity is needed to maintain communication between the public and the municipality. The results of this study confirmed that the most successful examples of social media use are in the largest Swedish cities. This is due to the fact that smaller cities do not have the resources to create and maintain social network accounts. The results of the study also confirm the so-called digital divide between citizens with higher socio-economic status and others, despite Sweden's pride in statistics on internet penetration (Larsson, 2013). In Portugal, the study aims to increase the visibility of newly elected officials, guide the influence of local authorities in politics in the face of political competition and promote the political involvement of inactive voters. The use of Facebook also ensures the transparency of municipal activities and promotes political involvement in municipalities with lower voter turnout (Silva et.al., 2019)

The results of a study on the use of social networks by municipalities in Mercosur (an economic and political alliance between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) in the Member States show that more than half of Member States have an active Facebook account, which Ma (2013) says is “modern and responsive. symbol”. The study also found that MERCOSUR municipalities publish the most information that meets the needs of the population, while the least attention is paid to content designed to attract users' attention and increase their return to the municipality's Facebook site. With regard to the social networking strategy, which involves feedback and dialogue between the municipality and the public, slightly more than half of the Facebook sites analyzed in the study encourage citizens to provide feedback (Rodriguez-Galvez et.al.,2018).

A study of the factors influencing the use of Facebook in Italian and Spanish municipalities concluded that, firstly, the use of the Internet environment promotes the transparency of municipal activities and the more active participation of citizens. Secondly, it was found that municipalities with a larger population are more likely to use social networks to reduce costs for marketing and advertising agencies and thus also promote transparency. Third, the study concluded that the use of Facebook in the municipality also depends on the income level of the population. Respectively, the study shows a negative correlation between the income of the population and the use of Facebook by local governments. Unlike other websites, such as municipal websites, Facebook is a user-friendly, very popular and inexpensive medium, so people on lower incomes can request more information through social media. Fourth, the study found that the lower the income level of the population, the more actively municipalities use

social networks (Guillamon et al., 2016). Similar conclusions were reached after the study in South Korea. Most municipalities in South Korea use Facebook for promotional purposes and believe it does very well. The main factors that most influence the use of Facebook in the municipality are population, financial independence, level of government, company that manages social media, average age and whether social networks are used for interaction or opinion gathering (Jae-In et. al., 2019). *Guillamon, Rios, Gesuele and Metallo* (2016) have emphasized that municipalities need to pay attention to the content they publish on their social network accounts. The study revealed a correlation that the lower the income level of the population, the more actively local governments use social networks. Low-income people are interested in social services, benefits and financial support, which is a sign to municipalities that such information can be published more and more often on their social networks. In the same way, municipalities should use appropriate measures to encourage different interest groups to use social media in cooperation with the municipality.

Often Facebook accounts of municipalities are used for private purposes. The results of a study in Portugal show that Facebook accounts of municipalities are often used for political purposes, which raises ethical questions about the separation of public and private borders. Supervision, control and sanctions against this type of activity are essential to ensure that social networks in municipalities are used only for institutional purposes and not to advertise and promote existing officials. However, the study also emphasizes that the regulation of municipal social networks is unlikely to become a successful (or even desirable) measure in the near future. (Silva, et.al, 2019) Similar situation is in Latin America, where a number of studies show that local government accounts are used for private purposes (Segado-Boj et al., 2015; Welp, Marzuca, 2016).

## **Methodology**

To analyse views of municipalities in Latvia on different aspects of use of digital marketing it was conducted survey of municipalities representatives. The survey questionnaire was sent out and collected from April 20 to April 29. The questionnaire was created using survey tool *QuestionPro* and sent to 119 municipalities of Latvia on *Facebook* or to the e-mail if the municipality did not have a *Facebook* account. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions on the basis of social media use in municipalities – about communication forms of municipalities, about most used social media, about content published on social media accounts of municipalities, about factors that affect social media creation in municipalities, about main opportunities and problems using social media in municipalities. The results of the survey were analysed using SPSS. For data analysis there were used indicators of descriptive statistics: indicators of central tendency or location (arithmetic mean, mode, median, quartiles), indicators of variability (variance, standard deviation, standard error of mean), cross – tabulations, statistical tests of hypotheses and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

A total of 87 responses by respondents included in the sample were received; demographic profile of the sample is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample of the survey*

		N	Percent
Position	Public Relation specialist	49	57.0
	Editor	3	3.5
	Project Manager	3	3.5
	Head of Development	2	2.3
	Youth specialist	2	2.3
	Other	27	31.4
	Region	Rīga region	1
Pierīga region		16	55,2
Kurzeme district		14	70,0
Latgale district		14	66,7
Vidzeme district		19	73,1
Zemgale district		21	95,5
Education	Basic education or lower	0	0
	Secondary education	2	2
	Vocational education	3	3.5
	Bachelor's degree	45	52.3
	Master's degree	36	41.9
	Doctor	0	0

*Source: authors calculations, based on survey "Social media use in municipalities" in 2021, n=87*

The most responsive to the survey were municipalities from Zemgale, where 21 out of 22 municipalities completed the survey, followed by Vidzeme and Kurzeme. Municipalities from the Pierīga region were the least responsive.

The person in charge of social networks was asked to fill in the survey and the data analysis revealed that in 49 municipalities this person is a public relations specialist, in 3 municipalities they were editors, project managers, in 2 municipalities social networks are administered by positions such as development department manager, youth specialist. Representatives of other positions that maintain social networks in municipalities are computer specialist, information circulation specialist, newsletter editor, customer service specialist, communication specialist, communication and tourism department manager, website administrator, design artist, spatial planning specialist, tourism specialist.

The average work experience of employees who maintain social networks in municipalities is 8.5 years. The minimum work experience among the respondents is 1 year, but the largest is 25 years. Slightly more than half of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree, while three respondents have a secondary vocational education and two have an incomplete higher education. The level of education of the respondents shows that the majority of employees responsible for social networks in the municipality have obtained higher education.

## Results of the survey

Data of survey indicate several findings giving inspiration for possible needed changes in information channels in municipalities – main indicators of descriptive statistics on use of information sources are reflected in table 2.

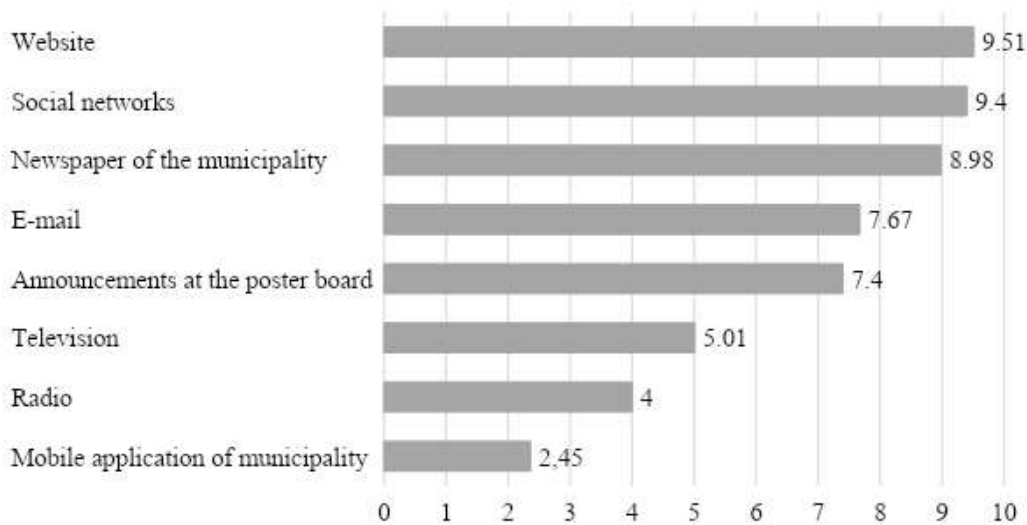
*Table 2: Main indicators of descriptive statistics on use of information sources by municipalities for communication with society*

Statistic measurements	E-mail	Website	Newspaper of the municipality	Announcements on the poster board	Mobile application of the municipality	Radio	Social networks	Television
N Valid	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	87
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	7,70	9,52	8,99	7,43	2,45	4,07	9,40	5,07
Std. Error of Mean	0,301	0,105	0,209	0,229	0,302	0,303	0,163	0,284
Median	9	10	10	8	1	3	10	5
Mode	10	10	10	10	1	1	10	1; 3: 5: 6: 7
Std. Deviation	2,808	0,975	1,950	2,133	2,815	2,828	1,521	2,654
Range	9	5	9	8	9	9	9	9
Minimum	1	5	1	2	1	1	1	1
Maximum	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

*Source: authors calculation based on survey “Social media use in municipalities” in 2021, n=87, evaluation scale 1- 10, where 1- used seldom; 10 – used very often*

Survey data indicates that almost all information sources are used and among the most important are website, social networks and newspaper of the municipality are among the most important sources of information is mentioned webpage – the evaluations in scale 1-10 the minimum of evaluations was 5, arithmetic mean of the evaluations was 9,52, the most often chosen evaluation was 10 (mode), half of respondents gave 10 and half of respondents gave 10 or less than 10 (median). For mobile application of the municipality were the lowest evaluations – average of the evaluations was 2,45, mode was 1 and median also was 1. It means that in Latvia this source is used less than in many other countries – it could be important signal for municipalities officials to develop information sources in the respective municipality.

*Figure 1: Use of information sources by municipalities for communication with society*

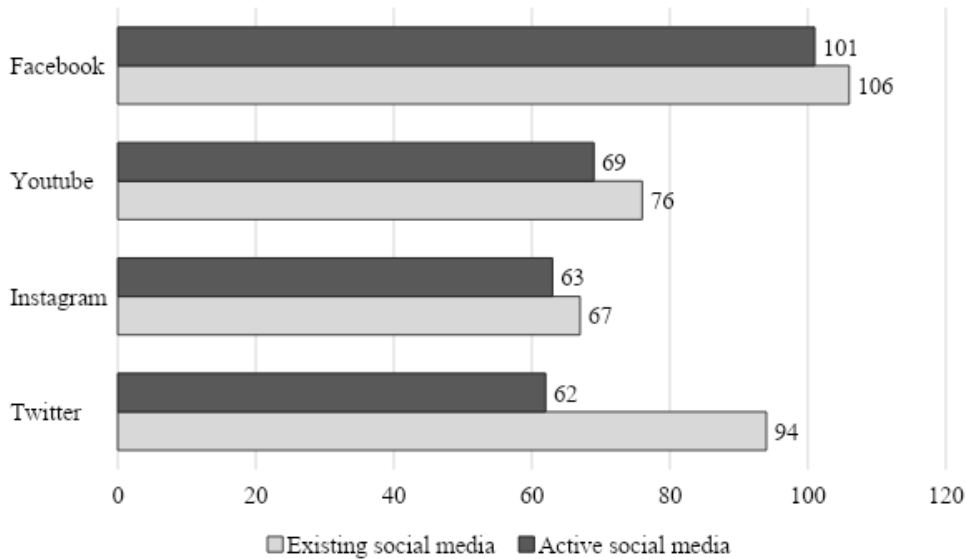


*Source: authors calculation based on survey “Social media use in municipalities” in 2021, n=87, evaluation scale 1- 10, where 1- used seldom; 10 – used very often*

Data of the survey confirm that the most important source of information in municipalities are webpages of the municipalities, social networks and also traditional source of information – newspapers of the municipalities.

Experience in the academic research has shown that several social networks are used for information distribution about the municipalities, this question was asked also in the survey. Survey data on use of social media in municipalities in Latvia are reflected in figure 2.

*Figure 2: Use of social media in municipalities in Latvia*



Source: authors calculations, based on analysis of social media of municipalities of Latvia, n=87  
 Information of respondents indicate that the most important social network in reflecting information on municipality different aspects is Facebook, followed by Youtube, then Instagram and Twitter. The least used social networks between municipalities in Latvia are LinkedIn, TikTok and Pinterest.

Table 3: Number of social networks used in municipalities in Latvia

Number of social networks used by municipalities	Number of municipalities
Do not use any social network	13
Use 1 social network	18
Use 2 social networks	24
Use 3 social networks	27
Use 4 social networks	37

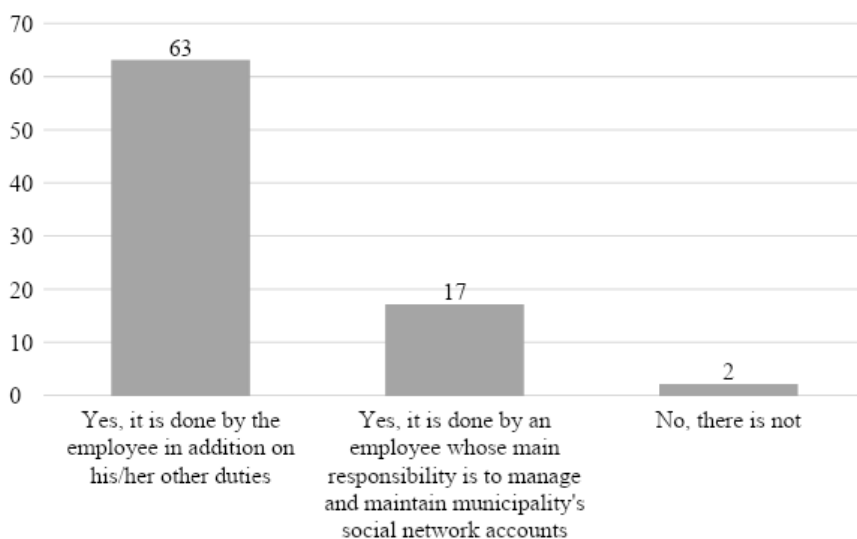
Source: authors calculations, based on analysis of social media of municipalities of Latvia, n=87

Information obtained in the survey indicate that there are 37 municipalities which use 4 different social networks but there are 13 municipalities which do not use social networks.

One of the questions in the survey was - Does your municipality have an employee who is responsible for maintaining municipal social network accounts? The responses of municipalities representatives are included in figure 3.

Figure 3: Does your municipality have an employee who is responsible for maintaining municipal social network accounts?





Source: authors calculation based on survey “Social media use in municipalities” in 2021, n=86

Survey data indicate that in most of the municipalities the information is social networks is done by employees in addition on his/her other duties and only in 17 municipalities the maintenance of the information in social networks is managed by person whose main responsibility is to manage and maintain municipality’s social network accounts.

Table 4: Main statistical indicators on evaluations of differences in means of evaluations on factors influencing creation of accounts for social networks by importance of financial support needs

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Number of inhabitants in municipality	Between Groups	43,414	5	8,683	0,816	0,542
	Within Groups	862,310	81	10,646		
	Total	905,724	86			
Average income in municipality	Between Groups	40,324	5	8,065	1,130	0,351
	Within Groups	577,952	81	7,135		
	Total	618,276	86			
Digital skills of inhabitants	Between Groups	28,236	5	5,647	1,174	0,329
	Within Groups	389,764	81	4,812		
	Total	418,000	86			

Level of debts in municipalities	Between Groups	3,218	5	0,644	0,172	0,972
	Within Groups	303,012	81	3,741		
	Total	306,230	86			
Age of inhabitants	Between Groups	39,940	5	7,988	1,171	0,330
	Within Groups	552,336	81	6,819		
	Total	592,276	86			
Location of municipality	Between Groups	42,015	5	8,403	0,819	0,540
	Within Groups	830,882	81	10,258		
	Total	872,897	86			

*Source: authors calculation based on survey “Social media use in municipalities” in 2021, n=87, evaluation scale 1- 10, where 1- is not influenced; 10 – has big influence*

Analysis of ANOVA indicates that there are no statistical significant differences in arithmetic means of the evaluations by needs of financial support for inhabitants by municipality representatives.

## Conclusion

1. Information of inhabitants in municipalities on different aspects of life in municipality is becoming more and more important with development of different possibilities by providing information: webpages, social networks, as well as keeping traditional way of information – newspapers of municipality;
2. Different countries have their traditional ways of communication with inhabitants but information technologies take more and more important role in information in municipalities.
3. Municipalities which have not devoted attention to importance in providing of information on social networks have to change their traditions and pay more attention on information availability of different municipality aspects in social networks.

## Acknowledgement

The paper was supported by the National Research Programme project “INTERFRAME-LV”

## References

Batraga, A., Praude, V., Salkovska, J., Afoniceva, O. (2018) - a. The Influence of Sales Stimulation Methods on the Behaviour of Consumers While Making the Decision on Purchase of Products in the Latvian Market Consumer Behavior, organisational Strategy and Financial Economics. *Eurasian Studies in Business and Economics*, 9, 3-23.

- Batraga, A., Salkovska, J., Legzdina, A., Rukers, I., Bormane, S. (2018) - b. Consumer Behavior Affecting Factors Leading to Increased Competitiveness during Holiday Season. *Economic Science for Rural Development*, 48, 329-33
- Bellido-Perez, E., Barragan-Romero A. I. (2020). "Backstage moments during the campaign": The interactive use of Instagram by Spanish political leaders. *New Media & Society*
- Graham, M., Avery, E.J. (2013). Government Public Relations and Social Medi: An Analysis of The Perceptions and Trends of Social Medi Use at the Local Government Level, *Public Relations Journal*, 7(4), 1-21.
- Guillamon, M. D., Rios, A. M., Gesuele, B., Metallo, C. (2016). Factors influencing social media use in local governments: The case of Italy and Spain. *Government Information Quarterly*, 33, 460-471.
- Hofmann, S., Beverungen, D., Rackers, M., Becker, J. (2013). What makes local governments' online communications successful? Insights from a multi-method analysis of Facebook. *Government Information Quarterly*, 30, 387-396.
- Jae-In, N., Anderson, C.D., Jin-Wan, S. (2019) Factors Influencing Social Media Use in Local Government. *Informatization Policy*, 26(3), 26-52.
- Larsson, A., O. (2013). Bringing it all back home? Social media practices by Swedish municipalities. *European Journal of Communication*, 28(6), 681-695.
- Ma, L. (2013). The diffusion of government microblogging: Evidence from Chinese municipal police bureaus. *Public Management Review*, 15(2), 288-309.
- Mainka, A., Hartmann, S., Stock, W.G., Peters, I. (2015) Looking for friends and followers: a global investigation of governmental social media use. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*. 9(2), 237-254.
- Perea, D., Bonson, E., Bednarova, M. (2021). Citizen reactions to municipalities 'Instagram communication. *Government Information Quarterly*. [in press], paper available in database Science Direct.
- Pittman, M., Reich, B. (2016). Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than thousand Twitter words. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 62, 155-167
- Rodriguez-Galvez, M. del M., Saez-Martin, A., Garcia-Tabuyo, M., Caba-Perez, C. (2018). Exploring dialogic strategies in social media for fostering citizens' interactions with Latin American local governments. *Public Relations Review*, 44, 265-276.
- Segado-Boj, F., Díaz-Campo, J., Lloves-Sobrado, B. (2015). Latin American leaders on Twitter. Old uses for new media during political crises, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 70, 156-173.
- Silva, P., Tavares, A. F., Silva, T., Lameiras, M. (2019). The good, the bad and the ugly: Three faces of social media usage by local governments. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36, 469-479.
- Welp, Y., Marzuca, A. (2016) Presence of political parties and deputies on the Internet in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 24(47), 199-224.