

## Conference Paper

# Globalization, Social Media and Public Relations: A Necessary Relationship for the Future?

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## Abstract

Globalization is a situation in which available goods and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar all over the world. The concept of Social Media is top of the agenda for many business executives today as social media are online services that allow users to create their profile, connect with others and navigate through these networks of contacts. The organizations use social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in order to inform their public about events, new products but their also ask them to express their opinion about the organization, its events and products. New technologies have affected the way that stakeholders exercise public relations. Rapid globalization has created new opportunities and challenges as well as public relations practices. The aim of the paper is to investigate how social media have reshaped the exercise of public relations in the global era. Have international companies and organizations extended their existing framework to accommodate these new tools?

**Keywords:** Globalization, Social Media, Public Relations, PR 2.0, Intergovernmental Organizations

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## 1. Introduction

The impact of the internet on how we lead our lives today in the developed countries can be seen in our everyday activities. Communication process has been affected as traditional ways of communications seems to be used less as time passes. Internet, social media, mobile phone, SMS are new ways of communications that has been adopted and used in the western world. Technology seems to play an important role the ways that public relations are exercised.

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Public relations practitioners in international organizations and companies understood the importance of social media. It is beneficial for public relations practitioners to understand how to use these tools as they relate to their jobs. The purpose of the study is to find out how international organizations are using social media for promoting their ideas and views. The research was conducted in 100 nonprofit organizations. Do they use social media, in what extent they use them and how the users are being engaged in those practices?

The research about the use of social media (for promotion) and international organizations is quite limited. In [1], the authors conduct a 2010 study about how public relations use social media in nonprofit organizations. The purpose of this study was to find out how nonprofit public relations practitioners are adopting social media tools and if they view them as credible. The results of this study indicate that social media tools are becoming beneficial methods of communication for public relations practitioners in the nonprofit sector. Organizations with defined public relations departments are more likely to adopt social media technologies and use them to achieve their organizational goals.

A recent study [2], investigates the various purposes of social media usage and its impact on organizational performance focuses only on the social media managers' views. The results also show that social media has a greater impact on the performance of organizations in terms of enhancement in customer relations and customer service activities, improvement in information accessibility and cost reduction in terms of marketing and customer service. Moreover, social media is highly used is to develop a good relationship with customers, to have effective communication with customers. Social media tools help organizations to have two-way communication with customers and has helped to improve the performance of the organizations in various areas.

## 2. Theoretical Background

In this section we establish the theoretical background related to key terms of this work; public relations, globalization and social media.

### 2.1. Public relations

Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays were, for many, the founders of Public Relations. In the late 1900s, public relations were defined as a management function, which tabulates

public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interests of an organization, followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance [3]. Although organizations have been “relating” to the “public” for centuries, the 1920s began what became the most dramatic set of changes in the public relations field, which continued in earnest through the 1950s [4]. The second half of the 1900s is considered as the professional development-building era of public relations. Trade associations, PR news magazines, international PR agencies, and academic principles for the profession were established. In the mid 1970s, Harold Burson, began advocating that the role of a public relations professional is to provide qualitative evaluation of social trends, which will help the practitioner develop policies leading to a formal corporate response [4]. Today, as claimed in [5], public relations play a major supporting role in the marketing of goods or services by business firms and some nonprofit agencies such as hospitals.

The authors in [6] define public relations as “the function of management between any organization and its public”. They believe that public relation process is being a two-way symmetrical communication. They maintained that with the two-way symmetrical model, both the company and various publics can change attitudes and behavior as a result of a well planned, two-way flow of information [4]. According to [7], “public relations is one of the most complex and uncommon elements of promotion. This element is an exceptional one because its results may be noticed only after a period of time”. From another perspective, public relations is considered as “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends” [8].

As suggested in [9], PR practitioners should use five environmental variables to design public relations strategies specific to a given country. The five variables are *political ideology*, *economic system* (including the level of development of the country's economy), *degree of activism* (the extent of pressure organizations face from activists), *culture*, and *media system* (the nature of the media environment in a country). In the same context, the authors in [10] mention that there are eight stages in order to plan public relations. The first stage is *situational analysis*, the second one is *determination of goals*, the third one is *determination of purposive auditorium*, the fourth one is *strategy*, the fifth is *tactics*, the sixth is *creation of a timetable-schedule* the seventh is *budgeting* and the last and final one is *program assessment*.

The main responsibilities of the Public Relation Officers (PROs) are: work towards the publication of a magazine distributed amongst employees and customers, prepare press releases, organize press conferences, make phone calls to newspaper publishers,

participate with other company managers in the financial organization productivity bonus program, organize preparations for new products, contact ministries and prepare up to date reports for the Board of Directors [11]. New technologies have affected the ways that PROs conduct their work. New opportunities have emerged, for example press releases can be sent through email to the media. In addition, a well-organized website of the company or the organization can affect public opinion.

Internet and social media seem to be the new weapons for the PROs in the 21st century. No one can ignore the power of internet and social media. Changes, in the field of communication "are taking place in the way that we use the media channels that have been available for us for many years" [12]. Social media offer numerous opportunities for public relations practitioners to interact with the public while adopting new forms of technology and integrating them into their everyday lives. PR 2.0 is a quite new concept that was introduced recently and its related public relations with social media. As claimed in [3], PR 2.0 was born through the analysis of how the web and multimedia was redefining PR and marketing communications, while also building the toolkit to reinvent how companies communicate with influencers and directly with people.

With respect to the PR 2.0 term, as stated in [13], PR 2.0 is a philosophy and practice to improve the quality of work, change the game and participate in a more informed and intelligent way. Empowering PR 2.0, brands are able to have conversations directly with their customers in niche Web communities. It is also mentioned that the differences between PR and PR 2.0 are: news releases vs. engaging with communities, spin vs. relevance, speaking in messages vs. genuine conversations related to the subject matter of peers and wire services vs. social/conversation tools and networks.

Kelleher in [14] found that, in the case of corporate blogs, public relations functions are "distributed" and performed "by a wide range of people representing an organization" who "do not think of themselves as public relations people". Of course, the use of the Web 2.0 in the era of public relations is a quite new task. That means the PROs need to develop new skills such as how to enter conversations online to represent their organizations. As [15] claims, they need to learn to write all over again in a new style that is very different from news releases, brochures, annual reports, speeches and journalism. They also need to re-learn media relations, as traditional media databases no longer provide the contacts needed, and bloggers and other social media authors usually do not accept news releases and rarely attend interviews or news conferences.

## 2.2. Globalization

Globalization is defined in [16] as “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural agreements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receded.” It is argued that globalization is traced through three areas of social life. Firstly, the economy: social arrangements for the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and tangible services. Secondly, the policy where social arrangements for the concentration and application of power, especially insofar as it involves the organized exchange of coercion and surveillance as well as such institutionalized transformation of these practices as authority and diplomacy, can establish control over population and territories. Finally, culture, where social arrangements for the production, exchange and expression of symbols that represent facts, affects meanings, beliefs, preferences, tastes and values.

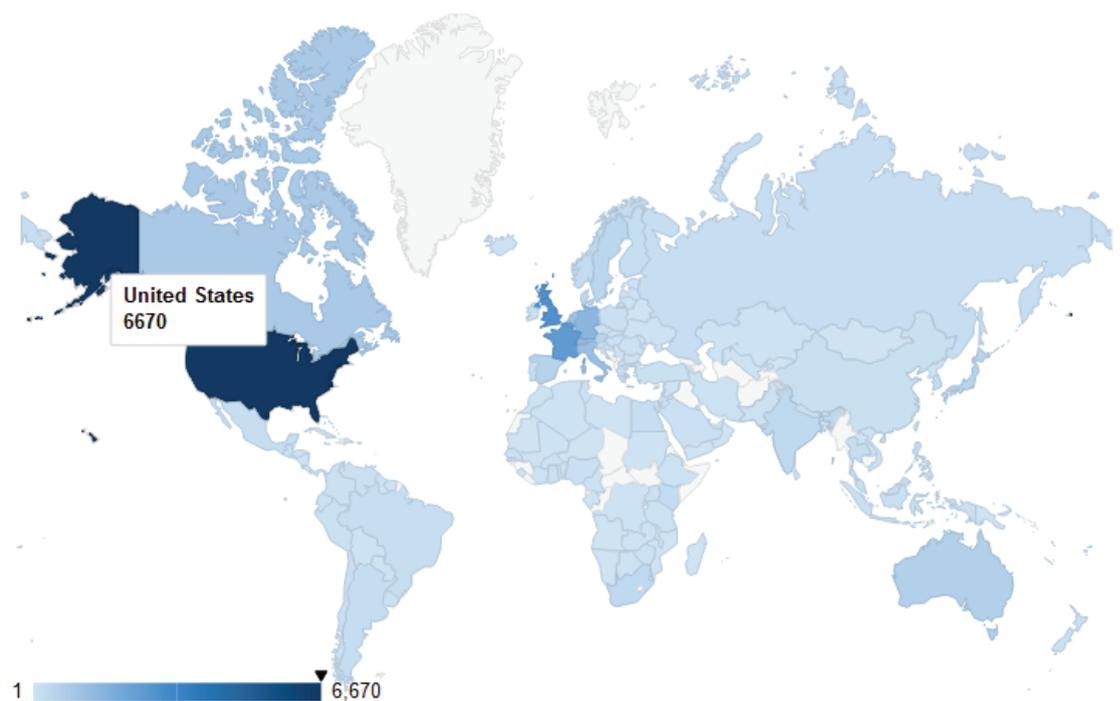
For the author of [17], “globalization involves time-space distinction but at the same time this privileging of juxtaposition of tradition and modernity tends to marginalize the special component of the process” (in [18]). Furthermore, the same author considers “globalization as the development of social and economic relationships stretching world-wide. In current times, many aspects of people’s life are influenced by organizations and social networks located thousands of miles away from the societies in which they live.” He believes that a key aspect of the study of globalization is the emergence of a world system, according to which and due to some purposes have to regard the world as forming a single social order.

McGrew in [19], holds that to talk about globalization is “to recognize that there are dynamic processes at work constructing and weaving networks of interaction and interconnectedness across the states and societies which make up the world modern system” (in [20]). On the other hand, Karl Marx has a completely different view about globalization [21]. He believes that “globalization caused an enormous increase in the power of the capitalist class because it has opened up new markets for it. Indeed the discovery of America and the opening of navigation routes to Asia established a world-market for modern industry.” Robertson expresses another important aspect about globalization [22]. He believes that “it is actually a mistake to see global and local influences as two completely separate and incompatible entities. Rather for the global to exist, it relies heavily on the local. Thus local is actually included in the notion of global” (in [23]).

The role of international organizations cannot be underestimated. In some cases, the role of those organizations becomes so significant that national governments lose

power and control. All international organizations are deliberately designed by their founders to 'solve problems' that require collaborative action for solution [24]. An important issue about international organizations is whether they try to be innovative in order to help governments to find solutions and to improve the solution of a newly redefined set of problems. The authoritative source for all data on international organizations, both IGOs and NGOs, is the Union of International Associations (UIA) located in Brussels and UIA's Yearbook of International Organizations [25].

According to the Union of International Associations (<https://www.uia.org>) there are 69,000 international organizations; 37,000 are active and 32,000 are dormant. These international organizations are located in 300 countries and territories and include intergovernmental (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs).



*Countries in Which International Organization Headquarters Are Located in 2013*  
From the *Yearbook of International Organizations*

**Figure 1:** International Organizations headquarters in different countries.

International organizations are also classified thematically, according to the principal activities they are involved in. The most popular subject for international organizations is that of Social Activity. Other subjects such as Security or Astronomy seem to be less popular thematic fields for international organizations.

NGOs are private voluntary organizations whose members are individuals or associations that come together to achieve a common purpose. Some organizations are



**Figure 2:** International Organizations thematic tag cloud.

formed to advocate a particular cause such as human rights, peace, or environmental protection [25]. INGOs in most cases have the same purpose with NGOs but they act in an international environment and they can have direct and indirect effects on economic growth within a country. INGOs are often the key actors in large-scale development projects, some of which, such as the building of irrigation systems or grain processing facilities, have the potential to directly impact the economy of the entire country by providing capital and creating new jobs [26]. The INGOs are defined as self-governing non-profit organisations, which operate on an international level to advance human rights, environmental protection, humanitarian response and other public goods [27].

Actually, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have gained greater importance and they have played key roles in international system especially after the 1990s. According to Union of International Associations (UIA), “an IGO is an organization composed primarily of sovereign states, or of other intergovernmental organizations. IGOs are established by treaty or other agreement that acts as a charter creating the group.” IGOs are organizations whose members include at least three states, that have activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal intergovernmental agreement. The follow research will focus to the most popular IGOs and will examine the ways and the reasons that they use social media.

### 2.3. Social media

Social media are computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available introduces challenges of definition; however, there are some common features [28]:

1. Social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications [29]
2. User-generated content, such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions, are the lifeblood of social media [29]
3. Users create service-specific profiles for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization [30]
4. Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user’s profile with those of other individuals or groups [30]

The popularity gained by different social media platforms is evident everywhere in our everyday life. Table 1, (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/>) lists the number of registered users for each platform, as of April 2017:

TABLE 1: Registered users for social media platforms (in millions, April 2017).

Facebook – 1,968	QQ (China) – 868	Snapchat – 300	Google+ – 111 (Apr 2015)
WhatsApp – 1,200	Instagram – 600	Skype – 300	Flickr – 87 (Mar 2013)
YouTube – 1,000	Qzone (China) – 595	Viber – 260	SoundCloud – 40 (Jul 2013)
FB Messenger – 1,000	Tumblr – 550	Line (Japan) – 220	SlideShare – 38
WeChat (China) – 889	Twitter – 319	Pinterest – 150	Vimeo – 22 (Dec 2013)

Initially, there have been some attempts to categorize social media into different classes according to their functionality. Today however, these borders are not as clear, as social media tend to enhance their original scope and offer support for additional services, e.g. social networking together with image and video sharing and tagging. A classification of social media and the importance of their different types for a company’s operational functions is depicted in Figure 3, taken from [31].

Social media usage among organizations is growing tremendously. Organizations are now building and maintaining social media public pages to improve their social

network salience, enhance interest in their organizations, and build relationships with the online public [2]. In the next section, we collect information on how social media are used by a number of IGOs and proceed with a statistical analysis of our results.

Type of social media	Corporate function					
	R&D	Marketing	Customer service	Sales	HR	Organisation
Blogs	☐	◐	◐			
Business networks					●	◐
Collaborative projects	●					
Enterprise social networks	◐				◐	●
Forums	◐	◐	●			
Microblogs		◐	◐		◐	
Photo sharing		◐				
Products/services review	◐	◐		●		
Social bookmarking		◐				
Social gaming		◐				
Social networks	◐	●	◐		◐	◐
Video sharing		●	◐			
Virtual worlds	◐	◐		◐		

Importance: (empty) none or almost none; ◐ low; ◑ medium; ◒ high; ● very high

Figure 3: Importance of social media for a company’s operational functions [31].

### 3. Methodology and Analysis of Results

The library of the Northwestern University, IL, USA, maintains a list of the largest IGOs (<http://libguides.northwestern.edu/IGO>). The list is not exhaustive, as in the case of the UIA Yearbook’s dataset and does not contain any NGOs or INGOs, e.g. Greenpeace or WWF. It is however a very good starting point, available for free, for the purpose of this work.

#### 3.1. Descriptive statistics

We extracted the alphabetically sorted list and populated an Excel spreadsheet. The list’s entries contain the URLs to the specific IGO, together with its full name and in some cases its acronym. There were a few cases with duplicate entries which had to be removed and cases with URLs that had to be updated. Moreover, when checking each IGO’s webpage to discover whether there is social medial presence or not, we

came across cases of dormant IGOs, or IGOs that were discontinued and absorbed by other IGOs.

After this “data cleaning” process, we ended up with 122 active IGOs having social media presence. There were 33 cases of dormant or discontinued IGOs, or IGOs with no social media engagement at all, which were not considered in our analysis. The 122 IGOs had participation in at least one social media platform or tool. Notably, there was one IGO (FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) which exploited a maximum of nine different social media platforms. This distribution (histo-gram bins and frequency values), which is summarized in Figure 4, suggests that on average each IGO has presence in roughly 4.02 different social media platforms. Median and mode values are equal to 4, while the standard deviation is 1.685. Skewness is positive (0.111) and kurtosis is negative (-0.193).

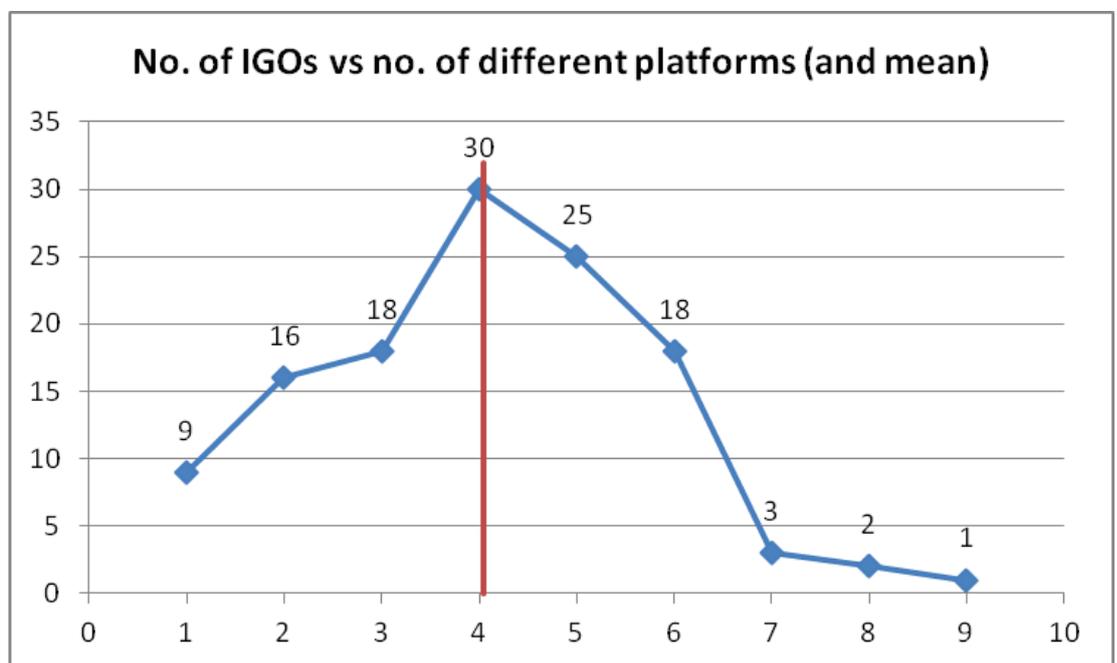


Figure 4: Number of IGOs vs. number of different social media platforms.

There were 16 different social media platforms that were discovered, while checking each IGO’s website. Some of the IGOs had dedicated blogs but this was not considered. RSS feeds, email alerts and contact forms were not considered either, although they appeared in the list of easy recognizable icons. Moreover, icons prompting the user to share part of the website’s content to a number of different social media platforms were not considered either, as this does not guarantee the IGO’s registered presence in any of those platforms. The 16 different social media platforms encountered and their corresponding frequencies and percentages are drawn in Table 2:

TABLE 2: Social media platforms and their frequencies.

Name	Score	%	Name	Score	%
Twitter	115	94.26	Pinterest	6	4.92
Facebook	110	90.16	Vimeo	4	3.28
YouTube	81	66.39	SoundCloud	3	2.46
LinkedIn	61	50.00	Issuu	2	1.64
Flickr	49	40.16	iTunes	2	1.64
Instagram	28	22.95	SmugMug	1	0.82
Google+	24	19.67	Tumblr	1	0.82
SlideShare	6	4.92	LiveStream	1	0.82

The bar plot in Figure 5 depicts the relative frequencies for each platform:

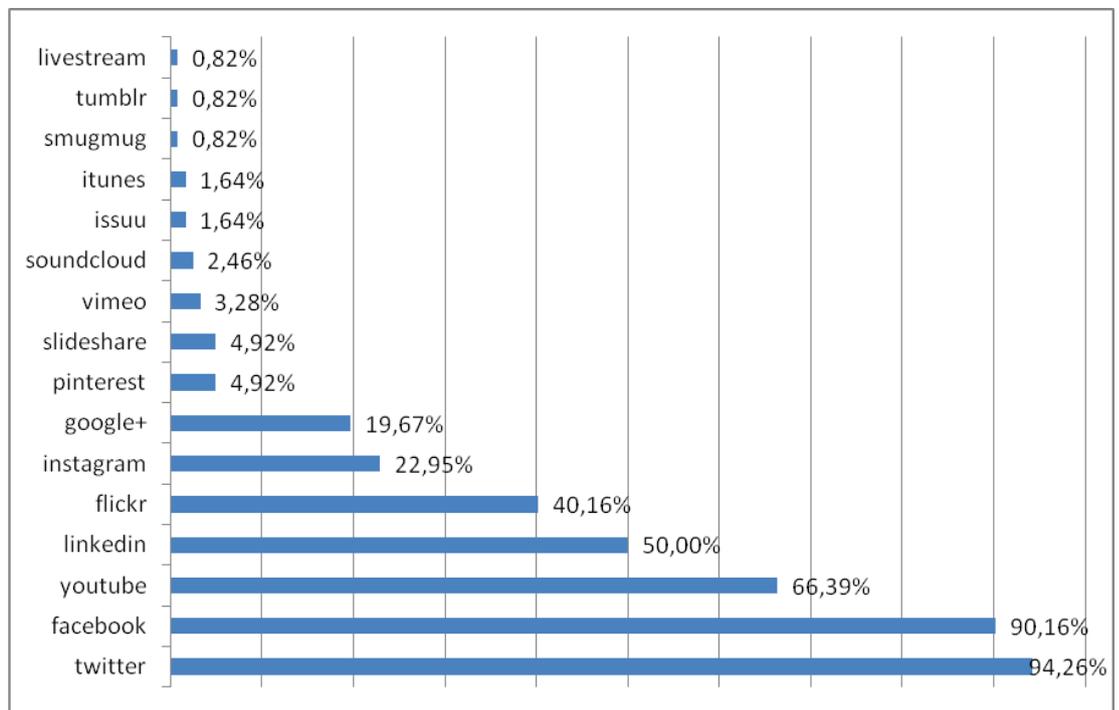


Figure 5: Relative frequencies for each platform.

As seen, Twitter (~94%) and Facebook (~90%), are the two dominant platforms. In fact, all but one IGO (OPEC - Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) have presence in one or both of these two. In the case of OPEC however, there is presence in the third leading platform, YouTube (~66%). Thus, we can state that all of the IGOs have presence in at least one of the first three platforms. LinkedIn (50%), Flickr (~40%), Instagram (~23%) and Google+ (~20%) are quite popular and occupy the next places. The last nine platforms are all below 5%.

Social media can be categorized as networking sites, photo and video sharing sites, blogs, wikis etc. In this context, we can say that Twitter, the most famous microblogging service, is the first choice (115/122) among IGOs for communicating with their audience by creating “information” and “attention” flow networks. Lately, Twitter has relaxed the original limitation of 140 tweet characters, and do not count photo and video links toward this upper limit. It is closely followed by Facebook (110/122), a social networking site, which has extensive support for photo and video sharing as well. YouTube (81/122), Vimeo (4/122) and Livestream (1/122) are video sharing and streaming platforms, whereas Flickr (49/122), Instagram (28/122), Pinterest (6/122) and SmugMug (1/122) are the IGOs choices when it comes to image hosting. LinkedIn (61/122) and Google+ (24/122) are alternative social networking platforms. Documenting sharing with SlideShare (6/122) is another option, as is Issuu (2/122), a free electronic publishing platform for magazines, catalogs, and newspapers. Tumblr (1/122), a microblogging and social networking website appeared on UNICEF website and an iTunes icon (1/122) for a respective mobile application appeared on UNESCO website. A final icon encountered was SoundCloud (3/122), an online audio distribution platform.

### 3.2. Inferential statistics

It would be interesting to extend our dataset with more attributes for each IGO, e.g., aims and the field of activities, the geographic location of the headquarters, the number of member states, the establishment year, relationships with other IGOs etc. Then we would be able to proceed with inferential statistics, discovering any possible correlations/dependencies in the dataset, testing hypotheses and clustering/classifying our IGOs.

A rigorous taxonomy of IGOs (and NGOs) is provided at the UIA website. According to this, all IGOs and NGOs are assigned a letter code which indicates its type:

1. GROUP: CONVENTIONAL INTERNATIONAL BODIES
  - (a) A. Federations of international organizations
  - (b) B. Universal membership organizations
  - (c) C. Intercontinental membership organizations
  - (d) D. Regionally oriented membership organizations
2. GROUP: OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES
  - (a) E. Organizations emanating from places, persons, bodies

- (b) F. Organizations of special form
- (c) G. Internationally oriented national organizations

### 3. GROUP: SPECIAL TYPES

- (a) H. Dissolved or apparently inactive organizations
- (b) J. Recently reported bodies - not yet confirmed
- (c) K. Subsidiary and internal bodies
- (d) N. National organizations
- (e) R. Religious orders and secular institutes
- (f) S. Autonomous conference series
- (g) T. Multilateral treaties, intergovernmental agreements
- (h) U. Currently inactive nonconventional bodies

These are clustered in five large clusters:

1. Cluster I (International organizations): Types A B C D F
2. Cluster II (Dependent organizations): Types E K R
3. Cluster III (Organizational substitutes): Types S T
4. Cluster IV (National organizations): Types G N
5. Cluster V (Dead, inactive and unconfirmed bodies): Types H J U

An interesting aspect is also the information data on cross-references between different types of organizations, e.g. type-A organizations cite type-B organizations 100 times. This enables the construction of a network of nodes and links.

With respect to the subject of activity, UIA discriminates between 10 different levels (0-9), which are listed below:

1. LEVEL 0. COSMOSPHERE / GEOSPHERE
2. LEVEL 1. BIOSPHERE
3. LEVEL 2. SOCIAL ACTION (STRUCTURE)
4. LEVEL 3. SOCIAL ACTION (CONTEXT)
5. LEVEL 4. CONCEPT FORMATION (STRUCTURE)
6. LEVEL 5. CONCEPT FORMATION (CONTEXT)

- 7. LEVEL 6. INNOVATIVE CHANGE (STRUCTURE)
- 8. LEVEL 7. INNOVATIVE CHANGE (CONTEXT)
- 9. LEVEL 8. EXPERIENTIAL (VALUES)
- 10. LEVEL 9. MODES OF AWARENESS

which is further categorized to sub-levels, e.g. sublevel 00 (Fundamental Sciences), contains a number of entries such as: Mathematics, Physics, Radiation etc. On each entry, partial (for types and clusters) and total numbers of IGOs and NGOs involved are provided. These tags and their scores form the information source for the tag cloud in Figure 2. The relationship between IGOs and NGOs and the area of activity is a many-to-many relationship. An organization can be involved in multiple activities and a specific area can be the topic of interest for different organizations.

For example, the 2015-2016 edition thematic classification is given in Tables 3 and 4. Considering this classification and enhancing our statistical analysis is however future work. Ideally, we would like to be able to extend our existing dataset of 122 active IGOs, to include more of the IGOs in the UIA Yearbook (needs a paid subscription or a 30-day trial through a library).

TABLE 3: UIA thematic categories – levels 0 to 4.

Fundamental Sciences (00)	Life (10)	Action (20)	-	-
Astronomy (01)	Biosciences (11)	Society (21)	Research, Standards (31)	Sociology (41)
Earth (02)	Plant Life (12)	Social Activity (22)	Health Care (32)	Management (42)
Meteorology (03)	Zoology (13)	Information (23)	Education (33)	Informatics, Classification (43)
Climatology (04)	Invertebrates (14)	Amenities (24)	Recreation (34)	Ekistics (44)
Oceanography (05)	Fish, Reptiles (15)	Transportation, Telecommunications (25)	Defence (35)	Cybernetics (45)
Hydrology (06)	Birds, Mammals (16)	Communication (26)	Religious Practice (36)	Psychology (46)
Geophysics (07)	Mankind (17)	Commerce (27)	Government (37)	Economics (47)
Geology (08)	Medicine (18)	Industry (28)	Agriculture, Fisheries (38)	Technology (48)
Resources (09)	Geography (19)	Societal Problems (29)	Law (39)	Environment (49)

TABLE 4: UIA thematic categories – levels 5 to 9.

Noosphere (50)	Development (60)	Innovative change (70)	Principles (80)	Consciousness (90)
Science (51)	Policy-making (61)	-	Purpose (81)	Authenticity (91)
Experiential Activity (52)	-	Emotional fulfillment (72)	Solidarity (82)	Love (92)
History (53)	Language (63)	Philosophy (73)	Idealism (83)	Comprehension (93)
Culture (54)	Design (64)	Aesthetics (74)	Harmony (84)	Creative expression (94)
Strategy (55)	Interdisciplinarity (65)	Security (75)	Integration (85)	Vigilance (95)
Theology (56)	Individuation (66)	Morals (76)	Meaning (86)	Transcendence (96)
Metapolitics (57)	Value Redistribution (67)	Community (77)	Sharing (87)	Freedom (97)
Agrosociences (58)	Invention (68)	Co-evolution (78)	Resourcefulness (88)	Perserverance (98)
International Relations (59)	Conservation (69)	Peace (79)	Equanimity (89)	Oneness (99)

## 4. Conclusion

The purpose of this work was to highlight the extent to which social media is exploited by Intergovernmental Organizations in the globalization scenery. It has been shown that the largest IGOs make an extensive use of different social media platforms, with an emphasis on the use of Twitter and Facebook. All but one of our IGOs dataset make use of one of these two. In fact, the sole IGO that does not use Twitter or Facebook, makes use of the third most popular platform, YouTube. Thus, every IGO has social media presence in at least one of these three platforms. Some other descriptive statistics measures were calculated and future directions for further inferential statistics analyses were pointed. The framework for this future work has also been established.

It is evident that, public relations officers at an international level have grasped the opportunity given by the wide spread and penetration of social media and are heavily using these practices to efficiently upgrade PR to a higher level.

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