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The Role of Social Media in Public Forest Management Policies during COVID-19: Implications for Stakeholder Engagement

Iulian A. Bratu [1,*], Lucian C. Dinca [2], Cristian M. Enescu [3] and Mirela Stanciu [1]

[1] Department of Agricultural Sciences and Food Engineering, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, 7–9 Dr. Ion Ratiu Street, 550024 Sibiu, Romania; mirela.stanciu@ulbsibiu.ro
[2] Department of Ecology, National Research and Development Institute in Forestry "Marin Dracea", Brasov Branch, 500040 Brasov, Romania; dinka.lucian@gmail.com
[3] Department of Soil Sciences, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Marasti Boulevard, 1st District, 011464 Bucharest, Romania; mihaienescu21@gmail.com
* Correspondence: iulian.bratu@ulbsibiu.ro

Abstract: Social networks have become increasingly popular lately, being a complementary method of expression and communication. With the adoption of quarantine and social distancing imposed by the authorities as measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, society has used the opportunity offered by digital technology to continue its concern related to the protection and conservation of the environment, especially the forest. The purpose of this study was to highlight the public interest regarding the forests in the context of COVID-19, especially the extent to which public opinion expressed on social networks has determined public forest management policies. The results revealed a major interest in preserving biodiversity and forestry, in reducing legal logging and stopping illegal logging, and monitoring of timber shipments as measures to combat illegal logging. During the analyzed period (i.e., 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2020), several legislative acts were adopted that overlap with the requests and needs identified by environmental organizations, acts that address the issue of illegal logging, conservation, and protection of the forest, monitoring the traceability of wood. The legislation adopted in the analyzed timeframe and shortly after responded to several major topics related to the licensing and withdrawal of the logging license for illegal logging, amending the legislation for the conservation of biodiversity and the classification of areas with virgin forests as strictly protected forests. An IT system has also been implemented by the government environmental authority that allows the supervision of timber transport, offering the possibility of active involvement of civil society.

Keywords: deforestation; illegal logging; forest conservation; public forest policies; social networks

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1. Introduction

Several severe cases of pneumonia from an unidentified source were detected in December 2019 in Hubei, Wuhan, China [1–3]. The infection was found to be caused by a virus from the coronavirus family. Coronaviruses are enveloped nonsegmented positive-sense RNA viruses belonging to the family Coronaviridae and the order Nidovirales, and are broadly distributed in humans and other mammals [4]. The major causes of human infections are determined by two beta-coronaviruses: either severe acute respiratory coronavirus syndrome (SARS-CoV) [5–7] or Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) [8,9]. Following studies on these cases of severe pneumonia, the identified virus received the name "new coronavirus 2019"—2019-nCoV. In a very short time, before January 29, 2020, the virus proved to be highly contagious, with over 4500 cases confirmed, including in other provinces in China, and in Thailand, Japan, South Korea, and the USA [10–13]. In February 2020, following their own recommendations [14], the World Health Organization announced that the disease caused by the novel coronavirus would be named COVID-19. As of 30 January 2020, 7818 cases have been reported [15], and on

11 March 2020, more than 118,000 cases of infection and 4291 deaths were reported [16], which led to the hypothesis that the virus was spreading at high speed, especially due to travel from high-incidence areas. To prevent the spread of the epidemic, the government of Wuhan carried out a lockdown in 23 January 2020. At first, COVID-19 was difficult to diagnose, and there were delays between test results and the correct diagnosis of symptoms. Moreover, although it was not known exactly how the coronavirus was spreading, it was still considered that the transmission is from human to human [2,17]. The best strategy for controlling COVID-19, in the case of China, has been to isolate each patient, establish the people with whom they have come into contact, prevent community transmission, treat patients, and vaccinate the population [18]. It was later found that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can be transmitted by direct exposure (respiratory droplets) or by contact with contaminated surfaces, conjunctival or mucosal contact, but also by oral transmission [19]. The European Center for Prevention and Control assessed the risk for people traveling within the EU as high, especially from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Netherlands [20,21]. In Romania, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 infection, declared as patient 0, was registered on 26 February 2020 [22]. In the following days, there was an exponential increase in infections, and the first deaths were recorded on 22 March 2020 [23]. In accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organization, Romania imposed a rigorous quarantine, legislated by Presidential Decree, initially for 30 days, starting with 16 March 2020 [24]. Emergency legislation was passed through Military Ordinances. The lockdown (involving severe limitations on movement and a strict nightly curfew) was enforced by the police, assisted by the army [25]. To a large extent, the majority of the population understood and accepted the quarantine, although no restrictions on freedom have been imposed since the communist period.

Under these circumstances, alternative solutions for face-to-face meetings had to be identified. New social media technologies offer vast possibilities for communication about personal life but also for the organizations. Thus, these technologies change the way we communicate, provide communication networks, and facilitate the sharing of information. Most often, in the workplace, social networks are used as a means of communication [26]. Moreover, it was reported that social networks lead to a better involvement in work [27]. Social media is a two-way communication through online services; it is a form of social interaction with the help of a group of tools (websites and software/applications). They facilitate the communication of internet users by creating, sharing, and exchanging content (text, photos, video, audio, multimedia presentations, etc.) between members of social groups, including at the level of educational institutions [28,29]. Each member seeks to capitalize on their identity, membership, creativity, and freedom of expression and participation [30].

Social media networks offer different facilities: social interaction, marketing tool, way of communication, etc. There are different types of social media: social networks, blogs and forums, microblogging, media content sharing, bookmarking sites, news of social interest, etc. In Romania, the evolution of communication media in the online space has experienced an accelerated growth. If, in the period 2000–2009, blogs were the most used, starting in 2011 Facebook registered a rapid rise and is nowadays the dominant social network [30].

It is noted that many corporations are adopting the latest communication technologies so that stakeholders can interact with social media users on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube [31,32].

In Romania, forests are managed on the basis of forest management plans, which are reviewed every ten years, and will be approved by Ministerial Order [33]. These forest management plans contain a description of the forest, detailing on plots of tree species, their dimensional elements (diameters, heights, annual growth, etc.), as well as the forestry works to be carried out (planting, thinning, cutting down old trees, etc.). The felling of trees has aroused strong interest among the society, especially because it has been proven that many logging activities are illegal. The governmental authority for environmental protection, which is overseen by the forestry department, has the obligation to create policies on

ensuring the integrity of the forest and its management to achieve environmental objectives. The involvement of environmental NGOs is noticeable, including in the solutions regarding the infringement procedures opened by the European Commission for not adopting and not harmonizing the environmental legislation for the forests in Romania. The involvement of stakeholders in the public consultation phase is a prerequisite that contributes to the adoption of the most appropriate measures, especially in a very sensitive area, such as forests [34]. Until the present, no scientific articles have been identified to address the issue of forest management policies during COVID-19 in Romania. The authors considered it opportune to analyze the role of social networks because during the analyzed period, the forest policies experienced an accentuated dynamic from the point of view of the approved legislation. The adoption of the legislation is conditioned by the process of public consultations, and the situation of imposing quarantine at the national level is a first in the last 30 years.

The aim of this study was to highlight the public interest regarding the forests in the context of COVID-19 and the imposition of quarantine measures (including social distancing), especially the extent to which public opinion expressed on social networks determined public forest management policies. The objective of the study is to find the degree to which the topics addressed by environmental nongovernmental organizations have been translated into legislative acts, determining government forestry policies.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Tools

To achieve the objective of the research, the following questions arise: (1) In the context of COVID-19, have social networks provided opportunities to crystallize and promote the requirements of forest policy stakeholders? (2) Can stakeholders play a role in adopting forest policies reflected in the light of approved legislation?

The hypotheses of the study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Lockdown caused by COVID has increased the interest of the population on social media on the environment.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Environmental NGOs produce content on social media that is found in legislative changes.*

This study is a retrospective of the activity and positions of the most active and visible nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of environmental protection that carry out their activity in Romania, being constantly invited to public consultations on forest policy [35] but also of the government authority for environmental protection (Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests—MEWF). We considered that the NGOs that were present at the public consultations organized by the governmental authority for environmental protection in the stage of decisional transparency of the legislative acts are representatives [35]. The study targeted the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic during the imposition of quarantine as the only way to prevent the spread of the disease. In the absence of vaccine and specific treatments with definite results, quarantine, isolation, and social distancing were fundamental tools for limiting human-to-human transmission of the disease [36]. The analyzed timeframe (i.e., 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2020) was in the proximity of the interval when the Presidential Decree no. 195 of 16.03.2020 regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the Romanian territory published in the Official Journal no. 212 of 16 March 2020 was in force [24], as a result of which the activity in almost all economic branches were suspended or drastically reduced.

According to the guide to social networks in Romania and Moldova [37], the list of the most popular social networks in Romania was as follows: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, and Pinterest. By analyzing the data from Google Trends, in Romania, Facebook was the most used social network within the studied timeframe.

The maximum activity on Facebook was recorded during the lockdown, namely from January to December 2020 (Figure 1). In Figure 1, the numbers represent the search interest associated with the highest point in the chart. The value 100 represents the maximum popularity of the term. The value 50 shows that the popularity is half of the maximum registered. Score 0 shows that not enough data is available for this term.

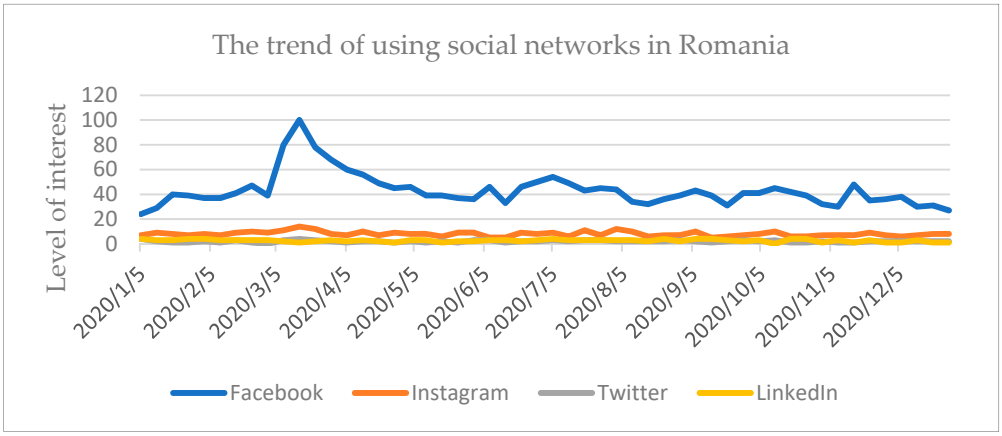

Figure 1. The trend of using social networks in Romania during the timeframe 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.

In Romania, there are concerns about the influence of social media on various fields: education [38,39], IT [40], nutrition [41], politics [42,43], national identity [44], and social stratification [45]. Social media forms the cognitions that are found in the attitudinal structure of human behavior [46]. Most authors conceive attitude as a three-dimensional integrative structure having at the same time a cognitive character (judgments, beliefs, knowledge), an affective character (favorable or unfavorable feelings), and conative character (tendency to action). The conative component would better predict the behavior of the individual, provided that the attitude and conduct are related to a well-specified element of the social world [47]. Attitudes are mostly socially learned, but they also have a genetic basis. There are three major sources of attitude formation: social learning, social comparison, and genetic factors. Thus, in the social context, knowledge is acquired, beliefs are formed, and judgments are issued, loaded with strong, most often negative feelings, which determine the tendency of action of public opinion. From the perspective of transmitting knowledge to readers, social media raises a major issue—the credibility of influencers [48]. The effects of social networks on the conative, actional tendency of the population tend to be negative at the level of compliance, people tending to no longer comply with social rules and norms. In order to increase compliance, authorities should clearly and empathetically communicate policies in different areas of activity [49]. However, due to the dynamics of users and trends on social networks, we appreciate that in the long run, such forest management policies cannot be designed, so the analyzed period is focused to the adoption of quarantine.

2.2. Study Criteria

The main social platform used in Romania was Facebook (Figure 1), being the strongest online communication channel. Therefore, this study focused on the main environmental topics which were addressed on this platform, the total number of posts, the number of reactions related to each post, and the number of comments, shares, and views (in the case of videos) being counted. The hot topics generated by environmental organizations as well as the responses and initiatives of the environmental authority were considered. In particular, the extent to which public pressure was translated into legislative initiatives, then adopted into regulations, was assessed. The analysis was performed by comparing the posts of the environmental organizations with the ones of the governmental environmental authority

which targeted the forest legislation that was adopted during that studied timeframe, in close correlation with the topics and requests addressed by each post. This study examined only those posts that focused on the forest sector.

2.3. Study Analysis

The collected data were structured as follows (Field name—Type): Entity—Data; COVID 19 subject—Boolean; Subject source—Text; Subject of post—Text; Forest subject—Boolean; Interacts—Number; Comments—Number; Sharing—Number; Video visualization—Number; Law impact—Text; Legislation generated—Text.

The data were centralized between January and May 2021 by analyzing the posts on each page and by filling in the database. Initially, a table for each entity (the three NGOs: Agent Green, World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace and the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests) was created, but for the final analysis, all the data were included into a centralized table. The next step was to apply the filters, selection, process, and analyze the data that were the subjects of the study. They were used as trend indicators for arithmetic mean, frequency and maximum value. Finally, to make the overlapping between the dates of the posts and their frequency, the legislation was adopted.

3. Results

The observations on the online activity revealed a progressive increase in these actions both of the public forestry authority and of the nongovernmental entities, with small fluctuations, the number of daily posts being constant. Topics that have been of interest to the community were related to disasters caused by natural phenomena—wind and snow that have led to the uprooting of trees—phenomena that have sometimes manifested over large areas of several hundred thousand hectares (200,000 ha and 2.2 million cubic meters of felled wood) [50]. Another topic of interest was the wood transport, which is strictly regulated by implementing a computer program for tracking traceability—SUMAL.

The European Commission assumed through the Green Deal the planting of no less than 3 billion trees [51], a target to which Romania will contribute. The planting of trees is carried out within the national afforestation programs under the tutelage of the authorities as an obligation provided by the legislation [33], or as civil society initiatives [52,53] or as part of the social responsibility of large companies [54–56].

Fake news represent a worldwide phenomenon, social media being the main means of sharing [57,58], and combating them is difficult, especially when they reach sensitive topics such as air quality and life. Under these circumstances, this study recorded parts of the activity of the government environmental authority aimed at combating the phenomenon of fake news. The activity of the analyzed entities, represented by the number of daily posts, is shown in Figure 2.

During the analyzed timeframe, in the case of the governmental environmental authority, out of the total of 622 posted announcements, 216 were focused on forests, which accounted for a total of 30,315 reactions, with an average of 140 interactions per post. By removing the abnormally high values, which will be treated separately, 156 interactions were recorded, on average, for each post. The number of comments was 10,859, and by removing posts with abnormally high values, the average comments per post was 85. A total number of 12,431 shares was recorded, and by omitting three posts, 99 shares were recorded, on average, per post (Table 1).

Four of the total posts of the governmental environmental authority resulted in legislative changes. The post from April 1 announced the amendment of the ministerial order requiring stricter regulations on logging as well as more rigorous monitoring and conditions for economic operators involved in these activities. One of the four posts focused on public access into the forest, and the other three introduced the concept of strictly protected forest area at the level of at least 75% of the total area of national parks. Afforestation was the subject that recorded the highest number of reactions (i.e., 4157), followed by wind-uprooted trees with 2962 comments and 4214 shares. It should be noted that the

video section accounted for 1.6 million views. Another topic that aroused interest through a high number of views was determined by a ministerial interview. Press statements, live transmissions, wood transport control, proposal for strict protection of 75% of the National Parks area, and wood traceability software (SUMAL) were among the topics that generated great interest. The topics that recorded the most comments were also the ones that gathered the most shares. Of all the posts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, wood transport control recorded the most reactions, comments and shares. The legislative proposals accounted for a total of 1686 reactions, 900 comments, and 729 shares. As for the case of video posts, the results indicated a strong impact determined by the number of views. Posts featuring videos of natural disasters with the forest lying on the ground due to the wind attracted 1.6 million views. The same effect was recorded by the press conference that gathered a number of 1.6 million views. A live video of the minister recorded 232 thousand views.

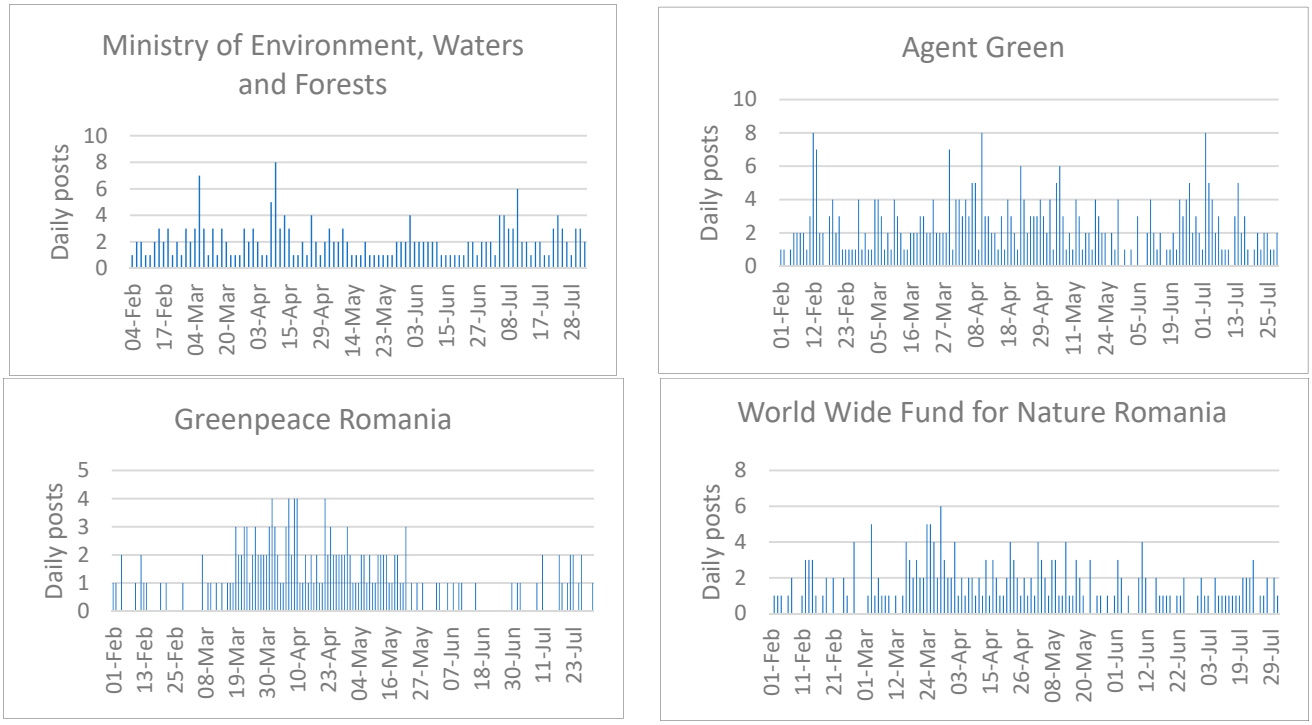

Figure 2. Daily posts of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, Agent Green, World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace.

Table 1. The main topics of the governmental environmental authority.

Subject	Posts	Reacts		Comments		Share	
Afforestation	27	4157	18%	751	7%	1451	9%
Natural Protected Area	29	3173	14%	234	2%	1627	11%
Wind-uprooted trees	6	2955	13%	2962	27%	4214	28%
Press statement	15	2644	11%	2330	22%	2043	13%
Live	19	2304	10%	1963	18%	1761	12%
Wood transport control	11	2199	9%	1262	12%	1317	9%
Wildlife	17	2116	9%	89	1%	971	6%
Wood traceability software (SUMAL)	16	1766	8%	667	6%	1223	8%
Illegal logging	7	1024	4%	333	3%	347	2%
Forestry Code	8	840	4%	183	2%	331	2%

Figure 3 shows the most shared topics by the community.

Forest logging, wind-uprooted trees, and wood transport accounted for more than half of all shares (52%).

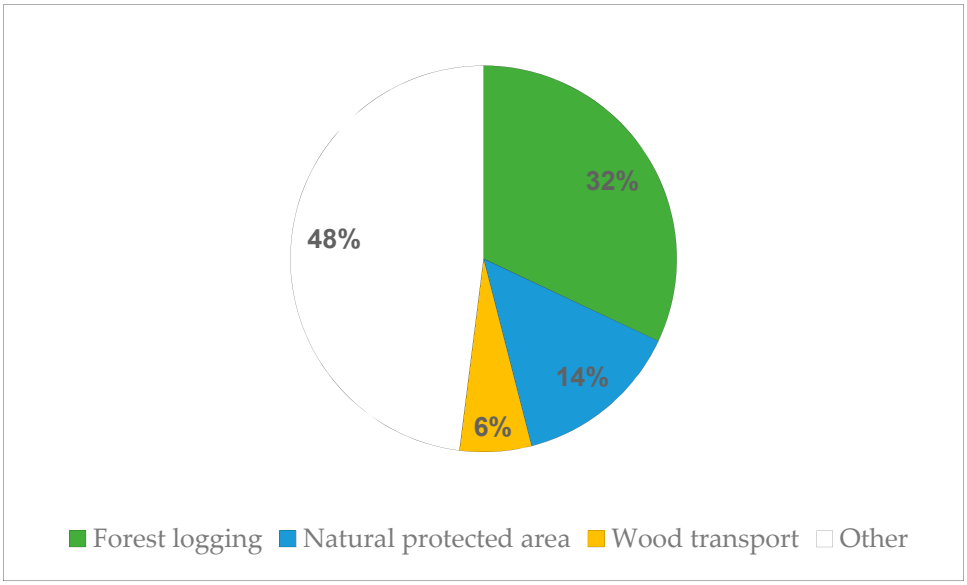

Figure 3. Top three topics promoted by the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests regarding the number of shares.

In the case of the Agent Green Association that manages a Facebook page with 216,260 followers (on 20 January 2022), during the analyzed timeframe, out of the total number of 411 posts, 312 were related to forests (76%), from which 20 were related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first 10 topics that collected the most reactions are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. The main topics promoted by the Agent Green Association.

Subject	Posts	Reacts		Comments		Share	
Forest logging	61	75,623	23%	7646	27%	61,282	32%
Natural protected area	45	56,203	17%	3394	12%	27,905	14%
Virgin forests	19	18,089	6%	1961	7%	10,707	6%
Wildlife	18	13,325	4%	1438	5%	8329	4%
Infringement illegal logging	22	9313	3%	1338	5%	6360	3%
Wood transport	8	21,254	7%	1158	4%	12,299	6%
Illegal logging	13	13,630	4%	1040	4%	7441	4%
Wood traceability software (SUMAL)	11	4100	1%	1000	4%	4214	2%
Poaching	3	13,044	4%	948	3%	3681	2%
National Anticorruption Directorate for Forests	8	10,753	3%	883	3%	1722	1%

Forest logging together with protected natural areas and the virgin forests were of great concern, being topics that attracted notable reactions from the community. Forest logging was by far the subject with the most reactions (23%), the most comments (27%), and the most shares (32%), meaning that the society has major concern about this subject. Protected natural areas represented another topic of concern to the community, attracting 17% of all reactions, 12% of all comments, and 14% of all shares. The topic that recorded the most reactions to a single post was poaching, which gathered 9027 reactions. The video on deforestation in protected natural areas recorded 137,000 views, and another video featuring the Virgin Forest Catalog garnered 126,000 views. The impact on the community, determined by the number of shares, is shown in Figure 4.

As it can be seen, forest logging, protected natural areas, and wood transport accounted for more than a half of the total shares (i.e., 52%), which indicates an increased interest in the three topics.

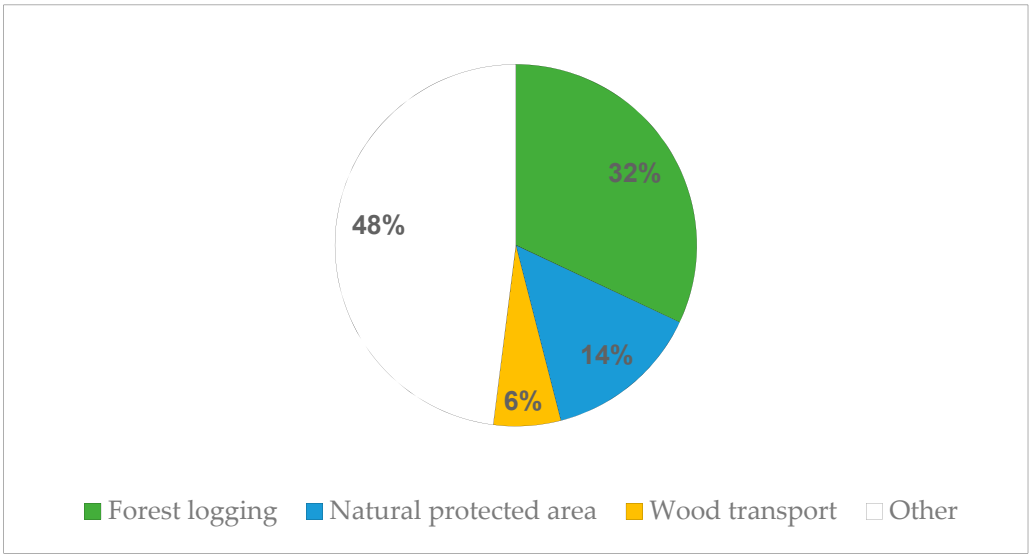

Figure 4. The first three topics in terms of sharing—Agent Green Association.

Another environmental organization referred to in this study was Greenpeace Romania, whose page was followed by 138,574 Facebook users. There were 372 posts, out of which 77 were related to forests (21%), and 10 of these were related to COVID-19. Table 3 shows the topics covered by Greenpeace Romania.

Table 3. The main topics of the Greenpeace Romania.

Subject	Posts	Reacts		Comments		Share	
Forest	17	4317	17%	363	15%	1070	16%
Wood traceability software (SUMAL)	9	3285	13%	827	34%	1265	18%
Forest day	2	2816	11%	94	4%	483	7%
Wildlife	4	2300	9%	48	2%	500	7%
National Anticorruption Directorate for Forests	2	1662	7%	168	7%	536	8%
Violence	4	1586	6%	90	4%	605	9%
Infringement illegal logging	5	1469	6%	115	5%	278	4%
Illegal logging	7	1136	5%	73	3%	357	5%
Forest logging	1	823	3%	70	3%	326	5%
Tree of the year	2	820	3%	32	1%	518	8%

As it can be seen from Table 4, "Forest" was the topic that attracted the most reactions (17%), while the wood traceability software (SUMAL) accounted for the highest number of comments (34%), and it was the most shared one (18%).

Table 4. The main topics promoted by World Wide Fund for Nature Romania.

Subject	Posts	Reacts		Comments		Share	
Wildlife	65	13,486	71%	343	48%	2571	63%
Forests	11	1083	6%	54	8%	406	10%
Education	22	1019	5%	31	4%	221	5%
Forest conservation	4	594	3%	5	1%	138	3%
Wood traceability software (SUMAL)	6	417	2%	61	9%	74	2%
Forestry Code	5	415	2%	31	4%	298	7%
Natural protected area	4	361	2%	13	2%	27	1%
Surveillance cameras	2	335	2%	5	1%	17	0%
Illegal logging	1	296	2%	26	4%	112	3%
Wind-uprooted trees	6	280	1%	111	16%	141	3%

The sharing of posts by the community is shown in Figure 5.

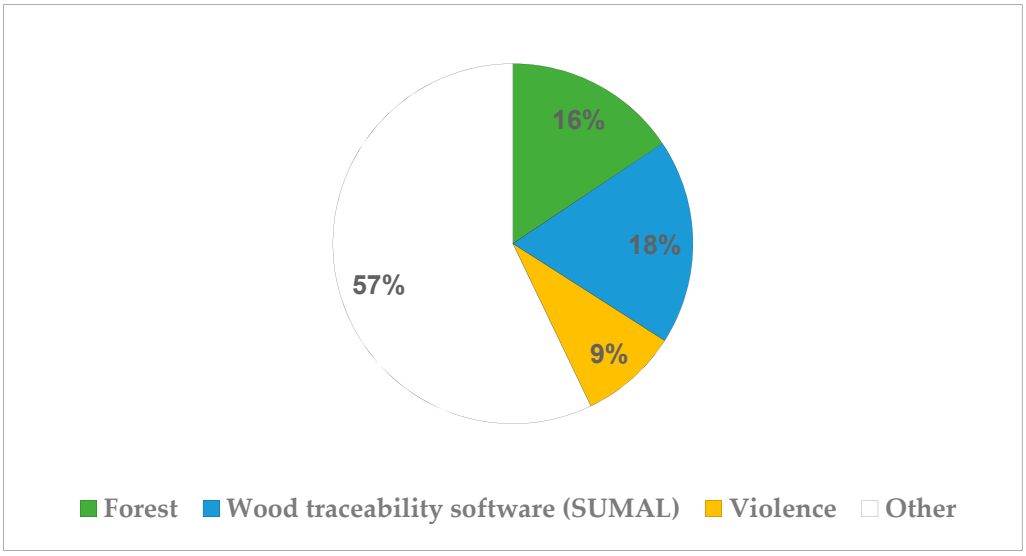

Figure 5. The first three topics in terms of sharing—Greenpeace Romania.

Forest, wood traceability software (SUMAL), and violence against environmental activists topics recorded in total almost 43% of the total number of shares.

The third organization taken into study was the World Wide Fund for Nature Romania (WWF), which is managing a Facebook page with 128,980 followers (on 10 January 2022). During the analyzed timeframe, WWF had 322 posts, out of which 137 were related to forests (43%), and 11 of them mentioned COVID-19. Table 4 shows the centralized data.

Wildlife was the most visible topic, collecting 13,486 reactions (71%), 343 comments (48%), and 2571 shares (63%). The single post with the most reactions referred to wildlife (1200 reactions and 588 shares), and wind-uprooted trees gathered 111 comments at the single appearance. The impact on the community, determined by the number of shares, is shown in Figure 6.

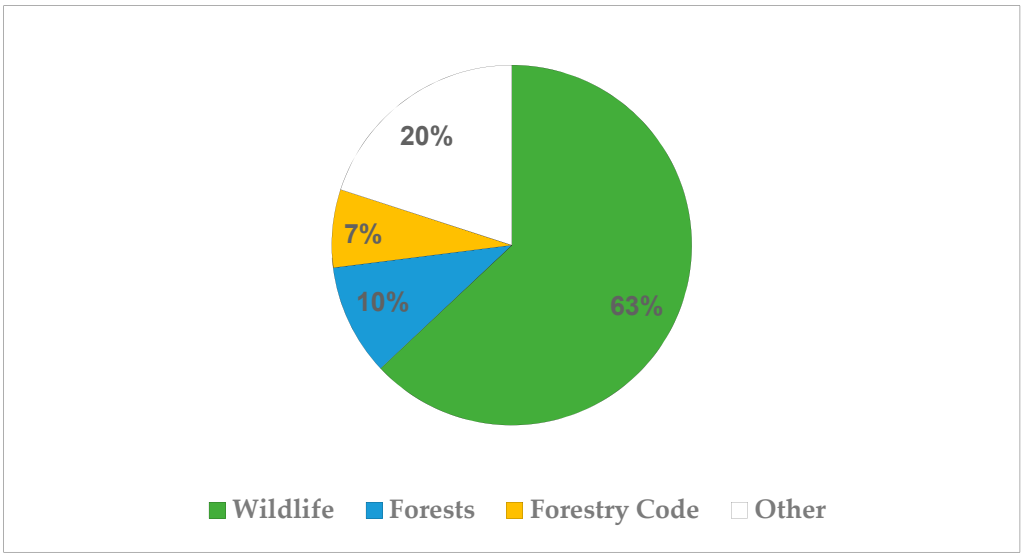

Figure 6. The first three topics in terms of sharing—World Wide Fund for Nature Romania.

The three topics—wildlife, forests, and forestry code conservation—accounted for 80% of the total number of shares.

Figure 7 shows the temporal evolution of the subjects of the analyzed pages in correlation with the legislative changes in the studied timeframe and in the next one.

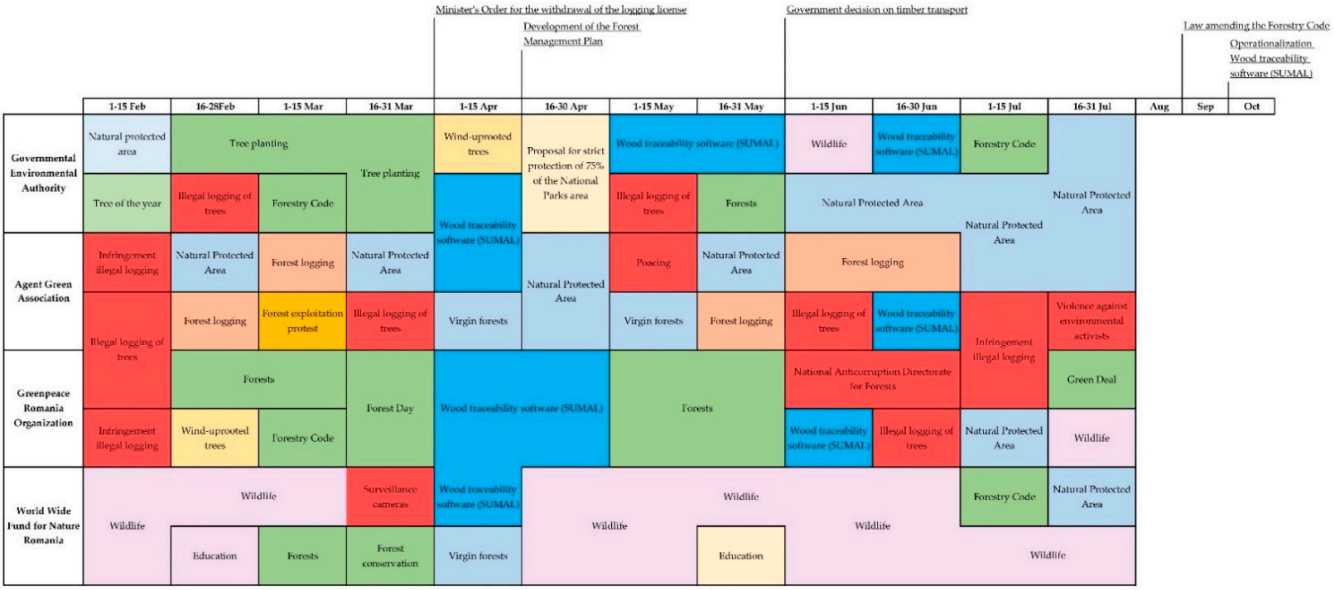

Figure 7. The overlapping between the topics promoted on the social media pages and the legislative changes.

As it can be observed, forest logging was present within the same timeframe on all the analyzed pages. Other topics, such as wood traceability software (SUMAL) and illegal logging of trees appeared with high frequency.

4. Discussion

A first observation is related to the number of posts and their trend in the period of the beginning of the declaration of the pandemic, starting with the middle of March. During the quarantine period, there is an increase in activity, and with the lifting of restrictions, in the second half of May, a decrease in activity, at the level before quarantine (Figure 2).

The results of the study reveal a high interest in environmental issues such as illegal logging, timber transport, and forest conservation. As shown, the transport of wood is monitored through the SUMAL software. The program requires that each wood transport is registered in the system by adding information related to species, type, and number of wood pieces, volume of the wood, and three photos of the loaded vehicle. The traceability system also allows the public, through a dedicated portal (www.inspectorulpadurii.ro) or an application, to check whether a shipment is registered in the system and, in case of suspicions, to alert the authorities via the single emergency number 112. The transport of wood is correlated with the cuttings, which is a hot topic for the Romanian society. In Romania, forest management is carried out in accordance with scientifically based studies valid for 10 years, with the role of management plans [33]. These plans contain the forest areas delimited into plots, in which, depending on several characteristics of the forest stand and forest site, different management measures, such as planting, thinning, and fellings, are applied. The application of felling is carried out through strictly regulated procedures involving notification and information to environmental protection authorities and forestry authorities [59]. However, as wood is an important source of income, the phenomenon of illegal logging was recently classified as a risk factor for Romania's national security [60]. Illegal logging is a major concern and a topic of great interest to society. Some initiatives proposed the installation of video cameras to detect shipments of timber originating from illegal logging. Other initiatives called for the establishment of a structure for the investigation of forestry crimes, initiatives that have been materialized in a legislative act adopted

by the Romanian Parliament [61]. However, upon notification by the government, this law was declared unconstitutional [62].

A major environmental issue is related to the natural forests that were not affected by anthropogenic activity (i.e., virgin forests). The identification of these forests and their classification as virgin or quasi-virgin forests is carried out following specialized studies [54]. Thus, by being introduced into the "catalog of virgin and quasi-virgin forests in Romania", these forests are strictly protected and excepted from any kind of cutting [55]. The forest areas classified as protected natural areas are most often included within the Natura 2000 network or within the National Parks. At the moment, the National Parks are managed on the basis of management plans, and they have an internal zoning that allows, in the area of sustainable development and to a much lesser extent in the buffer zone, the exploitation and cutting of the forest [56]. Recently, several NGOs initiatives aimed at stopping the fellings within the national parks were materialized as petitions [57].

The results of this study showed a high interest of the community in the environment, especially regarding forests. The governmental environmental authority presented phenomena and natural disasters (wind-uprooted trees) or the activity of its own apparatus: tree planting, controls related to tree felling, timber transport, press conferences.

Environmental organizations addressed the environmental issues in the form of community awareness raising, educational campaigns, afforestation campaigns, forest conservation, or raising the alarm signals about forest logging and the need to adopt measures to combat illegal logging, to make virgin forests protected natural areas, designate areas within national parks as strictly protected, and monitor the timber transport using surveillance cameras or traceability monitoring software. All these signals and campaigns had an echo. During the studied timeframe and shortly after it, a series of legislative acts aimed at reducing illegal logging, the possibility of withdrawing the operating license of economic operators for illegal logging, implementation of software for real-time tracking of timber transport and its traceability, as well as the amendment of the Forest Code regarding the access of the population to the forest were adopted. One can observe a high dynamic regarding the adoption of legislative acts, together with the intense activity on social networks of the environmental authority.

The obtained results revealed that there was a special interest in forest logging, especially to stop illegal logging, but also on timber transport and its traceability as a way to prevent the trade of illegally sourced timber. There was a close link between the subject of logging and the adoption of legislation to limit illegal logging, meaning that the normative acts and/or amendments were adopted, leading to the withdrawal of the cutting license if such facts were found. A legislative act (Order of Minister) regulating the procedure of attestation of economic operators for logging [58], which aims to strengthen the discipline of economic operators that exploit timber, was adopted at the end of March, and one of the most important provisions concerned illegal logging in the sense of withdrawing the exploitation license if it was proved that the economic operator illegally harvested timber. From the analysis of the topics and their frequency, as well as the request for messages, during the analyzed period, and until the appearance of the legislative act, it appeared that on the page of the Agent Green Association, in 36 out of the 60 posts were requests to stop the logging. World Wide Fund for Nature Romania page had 12 posts, out of which a post requested the cessation of exploitations. The Greenpeace Romania page had seven posts but with no legislative requirements. The governmental environmental authority page presented 16 posts, one of them aimed at clarifying the socioeconomic impact of the cessation of forest exploitation, while another announced the appearance of the legislative act [58]. Moreover, in the same timeframe (at the beginning of April), an Order of Minister regulating the elaboration of forest management plans and the classification in varying degrees of protection depending on the presence of protected natural areas was adopted [63]. A topic addressed by all NGOs is that of infringement illegal logging, so Agent Green Association has 22 posts, GreenPeace Romania 5 posts, and World Wide Fund for Nature Romania 1 post.

Similarly, a government decision regulating the transport of timber was put into public consultation and then adopted [64]. Moreover, the Ministerial Order aimed at optimizing SUMAL software as an important part of the strategy for monitoring wood traceability control of timber shipments and the reduction of the illegal logging was adopted [65]. Finally, the amendment of the Forest Code was initiated, and in September, the law was adopted, allowing public access to the forests [66].

5. Limitations

The study looked mostly into Facebook during the period of the pandemic timeframe [37]. Moreover, the analyzed entities have very limited activity on other social networks: on Twitter, the Ministry of Environment had 75 followers on 10 January 2022 (in the analyzed period, March 15 to May 16, it had no activity). Agent Green Association has no account. GreenPeace Romania, on 20 January 2022, had 4098 followers (in the analyzed period, it had 9 posts), and the World Wide Fund for Nature Romania had 1827 followers on 10 January (in the analyzed period, it had only 1 post). As for the LinkedIn, although it hosts the pages of the analyzed entities, it does not offer the possibility of queries older than one year. Agent Green Association announces the opening of the Instagram account on 4 April 2020.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The public interest in the forest is undoubtedly a strong one, argued by the large number of interactions on topics proposed by environmental organizations and the governmental environmental authority. It is noted that some organizations pay special attention to education and wildlife. Other organizations focused on forest conservation and the establishment of protected areas. The governmental environmental authority promotes its own activity and its own institutions. All entities were interested in conserving biodiversity and stopping illegal logging, and they were proposing solutions that often converge towards digitization and public involvement in the timber traceability process.

Simultaneously with the isolation induced by the measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, the interaction and especially the communication experienced a migration to social media. This trend also includes NGOs that are consulted by the government environmental authority on the process of legislative transparency. The latter has seen an increase in Facebook activity, especially during the quarantine period. During this period, there has been an increase in posts on gaps in forestry legislation with requests to amend it. According to the study data, the legislative changes have been adapted to the requirements expressed by stakeholders, according to their posts [67–69]. Coincidentally or not, although the data showed that it is not accidental, the legislation was adopted in the analyzed timeframe and, shortly after, responded to several major topics related to the licensing and withdrawal of the logging license for illegal logging, amending the legislation for the conservation of biodiversity and the classification of areas with virgin forests as strictly protected forests [68]. Moreover, the IT platform for wood traceability (SUMAL) was operational, offering the public real time access to wood transports where the public can observe in real time the wood transports, and in case of suspicion, they can alert the authorities that the Forest Code was amended to allow public access into the forests [67]. Simultaneously with the reduction of illegal logging, the timber market is less distorted, the economic effects being reflected in the value of traded timber [70].

Social networks are the virtual spaces that cause changes in attitudes and behaviors in society [40,66], pushing governments to major changes [71]. The social networks are a new form of expression of modern society with implications that lead to major changes. We can conclude that the participation of the civil society in the public consultation process regarding the adoption of the legislation—the NGOs being a form of its involvement, including the environmental policies—is also achieved with the help of social networks which provide opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

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