

COMMUNICATION THROUGH WEBSITES ACHIEVED BY THE CITY HALLS OF PITEȘTI, BRĂILA AND RÂMNICU-VÂLCEA

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Abstract:

Communication has a key role in the socio-economic and cultural-scientific relations, its quality largely leading to success in relations between individuals, between communities. Nowadays, increasingly more, the communication is based on the Internet development, a giant support with informational feature that connects thousands of local networks, keeping in touch millions of people around the world.

Internet is a peak of communication: a world in which information transmission costs almost nothing, in which the distance is irrelevant and a lot of information is available. In order to reach its goal, this new mean of communication is equally affordable for an amateur and also for an informatics professional.

The paper aims to investigate how the local government (Pitești, Brăila and Râmnicu-Vâlcea city halls) understood the importance of communication through the Internet, which facilitates interaction with external audiences and seek solutions in this way, one of them being the website.

Keywords: public administration, communication, on-line, Internet, website.

JEL Classification: M31, Z18

1. The current context of involvement in the online environment

Basically, we can talk about the most representative image of the modern means of interactive communication (Zbucea et al, 2009). Through their Internet presence, people learn to communicate, faster and better, their personal and professional concerns, traditions and customs being in a permanent change: there are established „virtual communities” based on common benefits or there are facilitated the contact and collaboration between organizations; there are started contacts with several people - individually or groups - in an easy way and it can be developed new channels of collaboration; the access to information is made differently, being important that they are received quickly, in various forms and from several sources (Balaban et al, 2009).

Thus, an important aspect of such communication is that it determines the participants to the sending and receiving information act to become more than just issuers, listeners or viewers, integrating them in a dynamic system (Boțun, 2012). However, it takes place the changing of the society and of many people's lives aspects. Local communities, governments or non-profit organizations get closer and closer to the citizens, receive their problems and try to solve them more efficiently.

Nowadays, the Internet, the World Wide Web and the email are the basic tools of communication worldwide. However, the digital revolution continues to expand in various ways, unimaginable a few years ago. Thus, the information users continue to migrate from traditional media to the online, many of them becoming Internet consumers.

By reducing the cost of the information storage and transmission the Internet creates an unlimited space providing resources that, previously, were difficult to obtain. Some of this information has always been in the public domain, but were inaccessible to many people because they were kept in special places or issued only to certain specialists.

According to a GfK Romania recent study about the people customs of Internet usage in Romania, published in January 2013 and found on www.business24.ro, 48.7%

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of the Romanian had used the Internet in 2012, growth rate being more important to those categories who usually accesses it less. In urban, Internet was used by 61% of the population in 2012, up 6.7% compared with 2010. It is accessed about 83% of 15-24 year old people, 71% of those between 25 and 34 years and 62% of those between 35 and 44 years. For this latter age group the Internet using increased the most (by 15% compared to 2010), followed by 45-54 years age range (up to about 8%). Regarding the education, 89% of higher educated and 52% of medium education people are Internet users, according to information from the study mentioned above.

Considering these above presented data and analyzing recent papers (Datculescu, 2013), it can be concluded that this support of all the information we need becomes reliable also for the central and local public administration of any country. Thus, public marketing is much more than communication itself, being based on citizen centred concept (Kotler and Lee, 2008). But really, can respond the above mentioned institutions in a timely manner and at full capacity to all the requests, to the information needs that become more and more acute? We intended to seek an answer to this question in the most concrete possible way, namely by analyzing the websites of some of the most important public institutions. Our choice has focused on three halls from the cities where the „Constantin Brâncoveanu” University has faculties, considering that both the institution as a legal entity, and its employees and also the students from Pitești, Brăila and Râmnicu-Vâlcea are using services and information provided by the above mentioned municipalities.

2. Short description of the cities of Pitești, Brăila and Râmnicu-Vâlcea

These three cities are county seats, with notable differences regarding their past, present and perhaps future, but universally characterized by the authorities declared aim to develop and raise them into the top of the most popular ones in the country as the living standard of their inhabitants, to make them more known and recognized, both nationally and internationally. We selected some information in order to create an image of these three institutions activities.

Table no 1. Comparative presentation of some indicators defining the three cities

| Indicator | Pitești | Brăila | Râmnicu-Vâlcea | Comment |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Documentary record | 635 years It was mentioned for the first time as a human settlement in a document of voivode Mircea the Elder, dated May 20, 1388 | 645 years It was mentioned for the first time on January 20, 1368, in a treaty of commerce given by Vladislav Vlaicu, voivode of Wallachia, to the merchants from Brașov | 635 years It was mentioned for the first time that the city on September 4, 1389, when Mircea the Elder mentioned in a document that is in the „reign city called Râmnic ...” | Same age, in the past being commercial cities of strategic importance for those times. |
| Population census in 2011 (number of people) | 148,264 | 168,389 | 92,573 | Population is significantly different and is decreasing in these cities. |
| Number of households | 59,044 | 69,043 | 36,990 | Significantly different |
| Number of buildings, from which housing | 6,928/6,886 | 22,188/22,134 | 8,617/8,573 | Significantly different |

| Indicator | Pitești | Brăila | Râmnicu-Vâlcea | Comment |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| County locating whose residence is | In the 3 South Region, alongside Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova, Teleorman counties. - Region population: 3,379,406 inhabitants - Surface area: 34,489 km ² | In the 2 South-East Region, alongside Constanța, Tulcea, Buzău, Galați and Vrancea Counties. - Region population: 2,848,219 inhabitants - Surface area: 35,762 km ² | In the 4 South-West Region, alongside Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt counties. - Region population: 2,330,792 inhabitants - Surface area: 29,212 km ² | Significantly different |
| Counties economy in terms of GDP / capita in 2012 | 4th place – 8,149 euro/capita | 17th place – 5,444 euro/capita | 24th place – 4,861euro/capita | Significantly different |
| The inhabitants average salary in 2012 - lei / month | 1,562 | 1,342 | 1,315 | Shows the state of the economy and welfare of the inhabitants |

Sources: www.primariabraila.ro, www.primariapitesti.ro, www.primariavl.ro, www.recensamantromania.ro, www.econtext.ro, www.insse.ro

Analyzing the statistical information it results that Pitești is the most economic developed city, followed by Brăila and Râmnicu-Vâlcea. We believe, however, that the ranking is relative and not very significant, especially since each of the cities are specific features in different directions, which overall brings them in a certain economic equality.

3. SWOT analysis of the three city halls sites

A milestone in the organization activity evaluation is the establishment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which it facing, through a SWOT analysis. This analysis has proved its very useful tool quality in the development and confirmation of the objectives and in the overall marketing strategy, which led us to apply it in this paper, in particular. The sites evaluation criteria selection was based on previous experiences of some specialists (National Association of Public Administration Computing Specialists, Administration and Public Services Research Centre from the Academy of Economic Studies etc.) and on the authors point of views.

Table no 2. Strengths / weaknesses of the three City halls sites

| Evaluation criteria | Pitești www.primariapitesti.ro | Brăila www.primariabraila.ro | Râmnicu-Vâlcea www.primariavl.ro |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Web address | Representative | Representative | Relatively representative |
| English version | Yes | No | No |
| Updated information | Yes, usually (exception - reference to the population of 2008) | Yes, usually (exception – reference to the population of 2008) | Yes, usually (exception - reference to the population of 2004) |
| Information about the update period | Yes, by the date of the newest information post | No | Precise updated and by the date of the newest information post, too |

| Evaluation criteria | Pitești www.primariapitesti.ro | Brăila www.primariabraila.ro | Râmnicu-Vâlcea www.primariavl.ro |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Information about cookies | No | No | Yes |
| Information about visitors number | Yes | No | No |
| Mayor visibility on the social networks | Yes, Facebook account (according to Mediafax Monitoring analysis, carried out from 1 to 30 June 2011, the mayor is present among the country top 10 as visibility, with 2.5%). | No | Yes, Facebook account |
| Front page design | Simple, the colour palette being harmonized to give the perception of seriousness | Apparently tiring, „cool” tone colour palette | Simple, the colour palette being harmonized to give the perception of seriousness |
| Loading site time | Optimum | Optimum | Optimum |
| Menus structure (easily identifying the main information categories) | Navigation is done using middle content, with the left or right menus groups. | Navigation is done using middle content, with the left or right menus groups. | Navigation is done using the top menus groups and middle content, for different public (departments and services, press releases, public debates). |
| Menus information details | Yes, gradual access of the various menus, going step by step, the visitor can view only the interesting information | Yes, gradual access of the various menus, going step by step, the visitor can view only the interesting information | Yes, gradual access of the various menus, going step by step, the visitor can view only the interesting information |
| Site map | No | No | Yes, unstructured |
| Information searching option | Yes, using keywords and filters | Yes, using only keywords | Yes, using only keywords |
| Latest news | Yes | Yes, not updated | Yes |
| Interactivity | Contact page, user message | Contact page, frequent asked questions, user message | Contact page, hotline |
| Virtual communities establishing (forum, RSS) to facilitate online interaction | RSS feed | Forum | RSS feed |
| Online forms | Yes | Yes | Yes, less visible |
| Online taxes payment option | Yes | Link to www.ghiseul.ro (SNEP) | Yes |
| Local council information | Updated | Updated | Updated |
| Useful links | Yes, with own departments and, also, with central and local | Yes, with own decentralized departments and, also, | Yes, with own decentralized departments and, also, |

| Evaluation criteria | Pitești www.primariapitesti.ro | Brăila www.primariabraila.ro | Râmnicu-Vâlcea www.primariavl.ro |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| | administrative, educational and cultural institutions | with public services companies | with public services companies |
| User account creation option | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Information about the visitors opinion (online forms, newsletters etc.) | No | Yes, online forms with few direct questions | No |
| Useful information (weather, exchange, corruption complaints) | Yes, weather, exchange | Yes, weather, corruption complaints | Yes, weather, corruption complaints |
| City map | Yes, interactive map | No | Yes, interactive map |
| City photos | Yes | Yes | Yes, not included in an album |
| Brief description of the city history | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Online users technical support | No | No | Yes |

Source: authors' evaluations

Common strengths for the reviewed sites include: local heritage using, citizens useful information updating, optimum loading sites time, menus structure and detailed information among them, citizens useful online forms and others.

Regarding **weaknesses** there isn't a common trend, the differences being related to issues about the content, as well as those specific to technical developments: presence of a foreign language version, information about the visitors' number, feedback about the visitors' opinion, interactive map and online users' technical support.

In order to accurately assess the quality of each of the sites discussed above we used semantic differential scale with 5 stages noted as follows: 5 - Very satisfactory, 4 - Satisfactory 3 - Neither / nor, 2 - Little satisfactory, 1 - Not satisfactory:

Table no 3. Evaluation with of the sites using semantic differential scale

| Evaluation criteria | Pitești www.primariapitesti.ro | Brăila www.primariabraila.ro | Râmnicu-Vâlcea www.primariavl.ro |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Web address | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| English version | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Updated information | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Information about the update period | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Information about cookies | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Information about visitors number | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Mayor visibility on the social networks | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| Front page design | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Loading site time | 5 | 5 | 5 |

| Evaluation criteria | Pitești www.primariapitesti.ro | Brăila www.primariabraila.ro | Râmnicu-Vâlcea www.primariavl.ro |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Menus structure | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Menus information details | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Site map | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Information searching option | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| Latest news | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| Interactivity | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Virtual communities establishing (forum, RSS) to facilitate online interaction | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Online forms | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Online taxes payment option | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Local council information | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Useful links | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| User account creation option | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Information about the visitors opinion | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Useful information | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| City map | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| City photos | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Brief description of the city history | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Online users technical support | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 108 | 89 | 105 |

Source: authors' evaluations

Analysis of each criterion enables each administrator to identify the strengths and weaknesses of his managed site, to relate to the others experience even further and, thus, to raise his site quality.

Opportunities:

- *The position in the context of regionalization.* Establish the region capitals will be a difficult political decision to take, each of the three cities considering that it has the best references. But the competition is very high; in each region there are counties and cities „claiming” to be the leader. An advantage could have Brăila, which houses the South-East development region administration.

- *The economic state,* which could increase the living standard of the inhabitants. Net advantage is currently for Pitești and Argeș County.

- *The decrease of citizens problems solving;* improve the efficiency of public employees.

Threats:

- *The stereotype,* lack of citizens' interest for novelty.

- *The economic state*, which can lead not only to the inhabitants' living standards increasing, but to its decrease. If current economic issues get serious (eg Oltchim, Arpechim, Laminorul etc.), the living standard will be affected.

- *The population* – decreasing in all three cities, with accents of aging.

- *The sites security* and the possibility of being affected by the informatics' attacks.

SWOT analysis conclusions:

It is appreciated the concern of the analyzed local government structures to capitalize this support of public communication, providing fast access to information and citizens problems categories solving.

It highlights a number of elements that shows the experience already gained, by what means wealth and structuring of existing information, but also a number of deficiencies that can be considered improvable. Certainly, these sites have been improved, according to personal views of different advisers, of the mayor image officials and even the mayors themselves. This process will take place further, it will be permanently introduced the computer novelties, it will be made comparisons with other institutions appreciated sites, it will accomplished marketing audits for progress.

We believe that the sites structure and content reflects the imagination of creators and web designers, but especially on those who have ordered them and have agreed on how to present and works to the public.

4. Online presence improving proposals of the analyzed administrative institutions

In order to increase the online communication performance of Pitești, Brăila and Râmnicu-Vâlcea city halls we defined a series of proposals that can be implemented within a reasonable time and with significant results:

- Continuing this analysis by comparing each of the three sites with the best in the country (e.g. the ranking developed and published by www.verticalnews.ro team in January 2012, located on the three top positions the city halls sites from: Cluj-Napoca, Arad and Iași) and their improvement, taking into account the deficiencies noted in this paper SWOT analysis.

- Introducing on the sites of some city halls presentation video clips and webcams live broadcasting from the most attractive urban areas.

- Using the „usability test” for a general evaluation of the web page or an electronic interface efficiency and ease of use by a person, to satisfy his needs. In the specific case of the three local administrative institutions to conduct the study is defined, by means of a sociologist, a representative panel of their target, people who have a computer with installed software that will record mouse movements and keystrokes, windows, applications and web browser opening. It will record movements, left and right-click types, and those on middle wheel. At the same time, the application records the users' reaction to the browsing of targeted sites with a web camera (with or without microphone). When the application can access the sound channel, a webcam with microphone or a separate one, this record can be added to the information flow. The user will be trained to say aloud what he is thinking, doing and what problems he is encountering.

- Indexing of sites in online monitoring services: traffic.ro top-site.ro, in order to get real and detailed information about users' activity and their sphere of interest.

- Developing the links exchange to other local institutions websites.

- Increasing the visibility in local coverage traditional media and initiating promotional services exchange.

- Creating mayor's official pages on Facebook.

- Achieving a periodically marketing audit for the three city halls sites.

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