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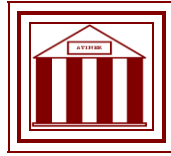# ATINER

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Local Communication in the New Technologies' Era

Ewelina Kancik-Kołtun
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
Poland

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Local Communication in the New Technologies' Era

Ewelina Kancik-Kołtun
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
Poland

Abstract

The increase of the role of the Internet in social communication creates additional tools for local communication. This causes the fact that the local governments in Poland as well as in Europe begin to use them on different levels (national and local ones). Local governments more often communicate with local societies with the use of webpages and social media such as Facebook. In my speech I will discuss the problem of electronic communication of local governments in their areas with the use of websites and social media in the context of information and civil societies. I will perform research on public social profiles and websites of local government units in Poland. I assume that not all local government units are active in social media and these which use them are unable to use them effectively for communication with citizens. It has to be noted that the following democratic processes are involved in a local communication level. To verify the research hypotheses I will use a qualitative methods- analysis of content and a quantitative analysis of the official local profiles. The aim of my research is to check the level of use of new media in communication with citizens of a certain area and to present the flow of communication and recognition of factors which determine it.

Keywords: Citizens, Local Communication, Local Government, New Technologies

Introduction

In the 21st century one of the main features of globalization in the world became the process of communication. It is worth noticing that in the 90s of the 20th century there was information revolution which was the sign of the third wave (Toffler and Toffler 1999). Changes which appeared in information technologies caused the creation of the information society. It significantly influenced the public sphere, with the inclusion of increase of citizens' quality of life. Information society in this article is perceived as "society in which information is intensively created in economic, social, cultural and political spheres of life. What is more, this society owns rich communication resources and tools for its transformation which are the basis for the main part of national income and ensure the source of livelihood for majority of people" (Krzysztofek and Szczepański 2005: 170). It develops in different forms and its basis is informationism, which means that the most important activities in all fields of human activity are based on information technologies, which are organized in information networks focused on information processing (Castells and Himanen 2009).

Information society with the meaning of the commonly used term used by people who work on development of modern fields related to collection of data, its' transfer and processing is a society which possesses technical and legal tools. Its connection with knowledge allows people to efficiently use these tools and make their lives easier as well as increase the productivity of their work (Złotowski 2001: 21).

In these conditions the Internet becomes the key factor which gives new meaning to the the web and creates transition to the new form of society. Networks constitute a social base of societies and their spreading is crucial to changes which appear in economic processes as well as in authorities and culture. The network consists of mutually connected nodes while a node is a point in which a curve crosses itself. As far as this approach is considered the network society is established by mutually connected nodes, is a dynamic and open structure which has the ability of limitless widening. The Internet then is its "material base" and "vehicle of changes" (Castells 2007: 467). *Despite the fact that you don't care about networks. They will take care of you. As long You will want to live in a society, here and now you will face the network society. This is due to the fact that we live in the galaxy of Internet* says Castells (Castells 2007).

New media, and Internet among them caused the development of modern communication systems where information is transferred globally and on a 24-hour basis and messages from senders and recipients are still broadcasted, decoded and the feedback occurs online. The development of new technologies also influenced significantly the activities of public administration. As it is said by Jan van Dijk new media constitute the potential of democratic systems and cause the strengthening of citizen position, participation and the revival of indirect democracy (van Dijk 2010).

In the era of the democracy crisis, former forms of politics, there are new forms of politics of society in the Web appearing (Barney 2008). New kinds of politics are the same – politics which are fighting for information

management and control in the "space" which are under control of communication media as essential conditions to access more material forms of authority (Barney 2008).

Considering Castells' opinion: "*A key factor is that electronic media became a privileged political area. Due to effect of convergence of traditional political and democratic systems, wider spreading of new media, communication and information sphere in politics is controlled by media space*" (Castells 2007: 467).

In democratic systems communication of clients of territorial governments is based on the transparency rule, which is characterized by the unlimited flow of information and is dependent on the country and its legal conditions. Undoubtedly, on the level of local interactions the dialogue model of the public sphere created by Jurgen Habermas can be applied including local communities' debates, social consults between local governments and citizens and for the presentation of new ideas (Habermas 1999). Nowadays, social dialogues are performed with the use of Internet tools which are needed for communication and the participants are considered as partners.

In the article I would like to present the research on communication of public administration with target groups with special consideration of inhabitants, businessmen and tourists. This research is considering electronic communication of three Polish cities: Warsaw, Krakow and Lublin. Research elaborates on Internet tools which are used by local governments, cities - webpages and the social networking website - Facebook.

A website is often defined as a set of documents (including not only the text but also graphics, animation etc.) in the Internet which is associated with particular topics, which includes the initial document, called also the main page and other documents - further pages and hyperlinks. Social media on the other hand should be perceived as the "interactive tools based on the web network, which apart from dialogues enable users to share contents such as pictures, movies and links to resources. Social media is used to create platforms of digital engagement and for contents supply. The tools of social media can be used for creating and monitoring of public opinion in the aspect of its mission (Gould 2013: 3-4).

Research Methodology

The type of research material needs a clearly defined research method, which should be understood as a typical and transferable way of collecting, formulating, analyzing and data interpretation (Nowak 2016). In my work I use qualitative methods, which means the analysis of text and contents. Considering communication I will perform a contents analysis of webpages and Facebook profiles of the evaluated cities. The analysis of contents should be understood as techniques of systematic testing of flows or streams and sets of transfer. It should objectively discern and identify clearly, formal and content elements and precisely estimate their appearance. Due to this, it should lead to the recognition of transfer contents and other elements which

are parts of the communication process (Pisarek 1983: 45). As it was mentioned before the topic of this research are webpages and social profiles of cities. Internet activity of city authorities was chosen accordingly to the theory of Richard Florida which explains that the cities are the most creative, dynamic and garner creative sphere (Florida 2010). The aim of this study is the explanation of local public communication and the presentation of trends present in the communication between local governments with social surrounding via Internet webpages and Facebook.

I assume that the webpages of cities do not use efficiently the Internet's communication potential.

Webpages will be evaluated with the use of following criteria which were created on the basis of literature (Nielsen and Loranger 2007):

a) address of a webpage should include the name of the city,
b) webpage division needs to include the following elements:

- inhabitants
- tourism,
- sport,
- culture,
- business,
- education,
- local government.

c) webpage should include the adjustments for visually impaired:

- contrast,
- font size.

d) webpage should be available in different languages (especially including English),
e) it should include icons associated with social media (Facebook, Twitter),
f) internal search engine should be available,
g) marketing elements need to be included:

- photographs,
- advertising movies,
- virtual walk,
- newsletter,
- weather forecast.

h) considering utility it should contain:

- forms and applications,
- clients' guidebook,
- actual data,
- contact details,

- important events,
- the option for news print-out.

i) visually it should have consistent graphic layout,
j) webpage should include communication elements:

- option for sharing opinions on news page,
- social dialogue mailbox,
- electronic submissions of things which need to be fixed, problems considering communitiy,
- reporting on problems with webpage,
- download of mobile version.

The following criteria will be evaluated in a pointing system, where each element can get 1 point while the maximum amount is 30 points. The themes of the research are the following webpages:
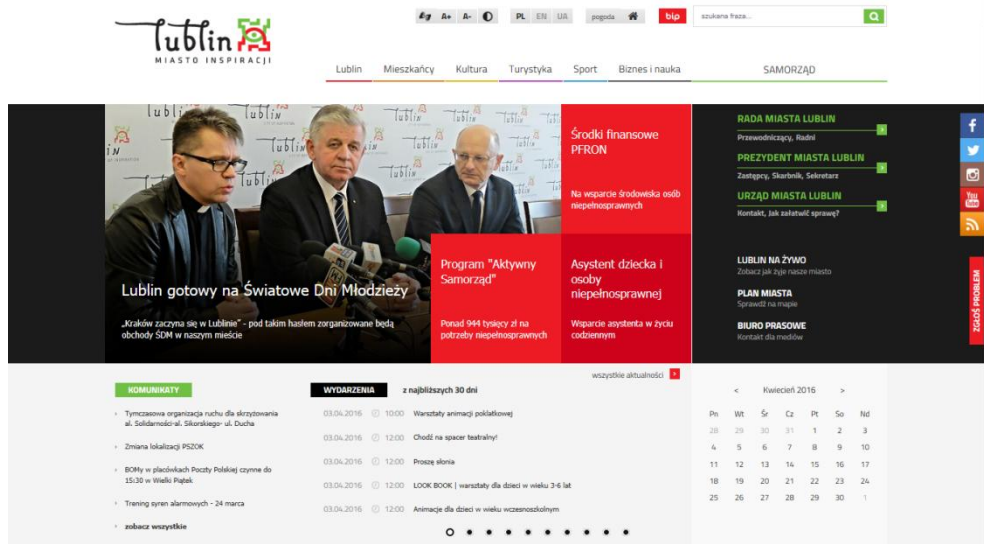
1. Warsaw webpage
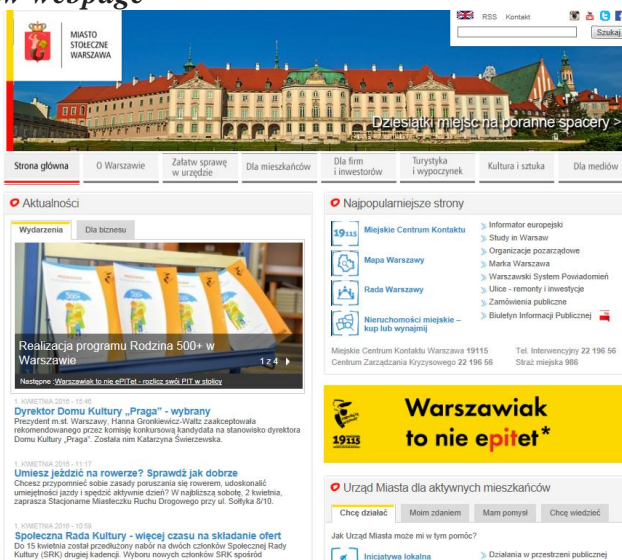
2. Krakow webpage

3. Lublin webpage

Performing the analysis of the social profiles of cities on Facebook, I will particularly pay attention to the type of profile, the name of the city included in the profile, formality, contact details, movies, photographs, numbers of comments.

The thematic of this research is meaningful for every citizen who lives in the area of a certain city but also for tourists as well as for national and foreign businessmen who use Internet to search for information. An interesting matter is the fact that local, electronic communication is relocated to the sphere of global communication. Most frequently Internet communication of local governments units' is aimed at inhabitants and it is visible in the structure of websites.

While undertaking this topic I would like to evaluate on how the local governments deal with the new challenge - electronic communication and how public administration works in the information society era.

It is important to pay attention that there are only a few of publications which focus strictly on local, electronic communication. This phenomenon is still new and not recognizable. What is more, there are some partial research papers which apply to philosophical, economical, media education, administration and sociology elite. This thesis was prepared on the basis of the following publications: *Building of a new civilization, Third wave politics* by A. Toffler, H. Toffler.

Results

During the analysis of the webpages of the chosen cities it is important to pay attention to the fact that all considered cities are very active in the Internet what is indicated by lots of posted news.

Table 1.

Criteria	Warsaw	Krakow	Lublin
Name of the city in address	1	1	1
In the menu: subsite inhabitants	1	0	1
In the menu: subsite tourism	1	0	1
In the menu: subsite sport	0	1	1
In the menu :subsite culture	1	1	1
In the menu: subsite business	1	1	1
In the menu :subsite education	0	1	1
In the menu :subsite local governments	1	1	1
Contrast	0	0	1
Font size	0	0	1
Availability in differentlanguages	0	1	1
Social media icons	1	1	1
Searchengine	1	1	1
Pictures	1	1	1
Promotingmovies	0	1	1
Virtual walk, panorama	0	1	0
Newsletter	1	0	1
Weatherforecast	0	1	1
Forms/applications	1	1	1
Clients' guide	1	0	1
Actualinformation	1	1	1
Contactdetails	0	1	1
Importantevents	1	1	1
News printout	1	1	1
Graphic layout	0	1	1
Comments in the news page	0	0	0
Socialdialoguemailbox	0	0	1
Electronicreporting of problems	0	0	1
Websitedefects	0	1	1
Download of mobile version	0	1	1
Total	**15**	**21**	**28**

Taking into account the determined criteria of well-organized and communicative webpages Lublin webpage earned the biggest number of points -28, on the next places were Krakow: 21 points and further Warsaw 15 points.

Every website includes icons for social networking website which are sometimes more and less visible. I would like to shortly analyze all the profiles separately.

On the Warsaw dun-page there is information that it is official but the user cannot find the contact details. Frequent actualization, new photos and movies show that the profile works properly. A similar situation occurs while we consider the Krakow fun-page which also does not possess contact data and the information that it is an official profile. Only a fun-page of Lublin city includes contact data.

Taking into account the number of likes and comments Lublin and Krakow are on a similar place. This data can show that there is bidirectional, proper communication between inhabitants and the local government unit.

Conclusions

The fundamental purpose of the Internet is sharing huge contents of knowledge collected in the whole world and assuring contact between people in every area. It means that while we connect the Internet we have access to all present data and we are also able to contact with other users. In Poland local governments started to use Internet and new networking forms of communication relatively late, because it happened at the beginning of 21st century. Undoubtedly it is associated with the wave of informatisation in East-Central Europe from the West. In the information society the use of Internet by local governments units allows a wide range of marketing and communication actions.

While evaluating selected case it is important to pay attention to the fact that Internet communication of town halls is mostly directed to the inhabitants of certain cities, further businessmen, students and to smaller extent on tourists. This matter is represented by specific languages with the use of which tourists can find information about the city, events, attractions or tourism. Despite the fact that Warsaw is the capital of Poland it owns only one additional language version- English in which there are some elements and content translated. Krakow's website is more useful for foreigners because its elements are translated into several languages.

To sum up the results of the analysis performed according to methodological criteria for webpages we can draw a conclusion that the most multifunctional and directed at different target groups was Lublin webpage.

In the last years Facebook becomes a modern communication tool but also a marketing one which simplifies the communication between the inhabitants and representatives of authorities.

Internet communication trends are more often used by national institutions with the inclusion of local governments. It is also worth noticing that citizens also communicate more often with authorities with the use of Internet tools such as Internet websites and social networks. The increase of citizens' consciousness in the field of law and obligations as well as the increase of active participation due to the realization of common and local interests is a sign of well-functioning of civil society. Facebook is a good tool in participation democracy and commitment in different social actions if authorities are able to use it properly.

As it is presented in the case analysis, it has to be agreed with Jan van Dijks's theory that new media constitute a new potential of democratic systems enforcing citizens position, their participation and the revival of indirect democracy.

It is difficult to evaluate what would be changed by implementation of electronic direct democracy aside from the obvious facilitations with pursuing referendums, votings, elections or raising of citizens' projects. It is

also difficult to assess if cyber-democracy will be an antidote to some of drawbacks of present democratic systems. It should not be expected that cybernetic and social revolutions will appear. It is more probable that an evolution in the democratic systems will occur, and in developed countries it will be associated with the Internet[1].

Nowadays the Web plays a crucial role in the development of democratic institutions and is also an inspiring example of a well-functioning system without formal authority which has a constraint tool. Cyber-democracy will eliminate or decrease present drawbacks of the democratic system but also cannot be an ideal system. Instead of present problems the new will appear which are not experienced by us now (Kaczmarczyk 1998: 48-51).

The Web is a great tool of democracy according to political institutions functioning: parliament, government, political parties as well as local governments. Citizens have unlimited access to all information, Internet communication with political institutions in the network. Online bureaucracy allows faster completion of official issues with decreasing of the costs of administrations' functioning. It can be noticed that Internet guarantees pluralism of opinion and information, strengthens laws of citizens, widens opportunities of social membership and permanently allows citizens to make local political decisions and gives options to different members of the society to become active producers of information and opinion instead of being its passive receivers. It is also worth noticing that in Internet communication the number of agents is limited in comparison with TV information. This is why information present there can be more valuable because it is not distorted.

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