

INFORMATION-VISUAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION SCHOOL WITH PARENTS

D. Švelec-Juričić, L. Luić

University North (CROATIA)

Abstract

Extremely important participants in the education system, who also represent the interested public, are the parents with whom school employees in complex processes that take place during the school year, establish collaborative relationships. One of the ways of communication with parents is digital communication through a website performed by teachers, professional associates and principals who do not have a formal education in the field of public relations. Observing the mentioned problem, a research question was asked "Do teachers influence the creation of parents' attitudes towards school based on digital communication?" Opinions on the information-visual aspects of digital communication were examined: content and size of publications, visual characteristics of the website, dynamics of publications, frequency of visits to the website and the impact of publications on the creation of parents' attitudes towards school. With the statistical analysis of the results of a survey conducted on a sample of 150 teachers and 483 parents, the hypothesis, which claims that teachers consider the information aspect of communication through the website more important than visual preferred by parents, was confirmed. Given that the area of the role of digital communication in shaping public attitudes, general and those of interest, towards the school is quite unexplored, this paper can serve as a starting point for further scientific research in the field of communication and public relations.

Keywords: Digital communication, information aspects, visual aspects, school, teachers, parents.

1 INTRODUCTION

Human is the only living being who communicates in a way that exchanges information, expresses feelings, uses data that he has heard, learned and processed. Human being learns, acquires new knowledge using information about the present, past and future. Communication skills have developed, strengthened, proven their power and importance over the millennia, participated in and witnessed the development of human civilization [1]. Brajša [2] states how conversation activates and maintains a brain that needs a constant flow of words, information, messages, and communication contacts to develop and function. If we do not provide the brain with the "fuel" that drives it, it will simply fail. The brain is the basic means and organ of conversation that developed under the influence of communicative touches during our childhood and development. Societies in which there is a greater application of computer technology in communication processes stand out with a higher degree of development. Harold Lasswell, an American communication theorist, defined the 1948 model of communication. Lasswell's linear process of communication states that mass communication as a process must answer five questions: who? (communicator) says what? (message) by which channel? (medium) to whom? (audience) with what result does he count? (effect) [1]. Communication takes place in written and oral form. Oral communication, by definition, has many advantages over other forms of communication: speed of receiving feedback, eliminating possible misunderstanding of the message with quick and effective intervention, eliminating the possible physical cause of noise in the channel, easier and simpler completing the message with nonverbal cues [3]. Reardon points out that interpersonal communication (communication between at least two people) is reflected in the following features that distinguish it from other forms of communication: includes verbal and nonverbal behavior, includes spontaneous, practiced and planned behavior, is not static but developmental, involves direct feedback, interaction and coherence, takes place in accordance with some internal and external rules, interpersonal communication is an activity, it involves persuasion [4]. Non-verbal signs by which we communicate on a daily basis in indirect communication are facial expressions, gaze, gestures, posture, clothing, distance from the interlocutor and tone of voice. Non-verbal elements are also present in written communication such as color, graphic features, font size, clarity, readability and together with the content they participate in decoding and understanding the message. It is these elements that are an integral part of digital communication with parents that takes place on the primary school website. Tomić [5, p. 1204] defines a web page as "a document that enables the presentation of text and links and is accessible through its URL (web) address. In addition to text, the web page can

also display multimedia elements such as images in digital format (jpg, jpeg, gif, png, bmp,...) "The Internet personality of every organization, including educational institutions, is determined by the website which provides information to the public in a meaningful, interesting and content-rich way, with a note of fun and enjoyment [6]. The medium is an intermediary in the transmission of communications, and most often they are material or physical carriers of communications [7]. Everything we can say and know about this world is spoken and known with the help of the media. The media, therefore, not only serve to convey the message, but also participate in the content and thus gain a spiritual, cultural and scientific dimension by giving them the power to participate in the production of meaning [8]. Digital communication has its own specifics, and users of digital communication differ in a number of characteristics from "old" users. Activity, unpredictability, dynamism (use of multiple media), disloyalty, demanding, public criticism, social networking, disobedience, impatience, mobility, better understanding and use of technology are the characteristics of digital technology users. In addition to all of the above, they are both users and creators of content [9]. Modern digital media provide interactivity, multimodality and nonlinearity thus requiring new forms of work and communication of individuals [10]. A school that is responsible and open in its activities sends all its qualities to the public space through the channel that is the most acceptable, fastest and most efficient in today's digital age - the Internet. School educators must constantly monitor, listen and look for new ways to communicate effectively with parents and must adapt to the needs of parents as a segmented public. A decade ago, all communication with parents took place in writing, by sending notices in paper form. Although the school's website existed, not all parents had smartphones and an always-available network, and a lack of communication with parents would certainly undermine parent-school collaboration. Technological advances and the digitalization of business and communication have also become a *modus operandi* in schools, and a level has been reached where digital communication is expected. The visibility of the school in public space has become a very important segment in the systematic and planned implementation of strategies for creating, improving and enhancing the reputation and identity of the school. School employees communicate daily at all levels and with all participants in the school system (students - teachers - parents - school administration - local community - founder - ministry). Communication takes place on a horizontal and vertical basis as a fundamental tool for ensuring the functioning of the system and development of processes, and the legislator did not provide for the obligation to create communication strategies that would be systematically and systematically implemented by public relations. The creators of the visual and information components of the website are teachers, who have no formal education in the field of public relations, and whose knowledge, experience and competence directly affect the quality of the website. The visual and information determinants of the website participate in creating an attitude towards the school, which is the subject of research in this paper. The aim of the research is to determine whether teachers influence the formation of parents' attitudes towards school based on digital communication. Starting from the problem and the goal, hypotheses have been set to determine whether teachers influence the formation of parents' attitudes towards school.

- H1. Teachers significantly influence the creation of parents' attitudes towards school.
- H2. Teachers consider the information component more important than the visual one.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a survey questionnaire on a sample of teachers and professional associates of primary schools in Varaždin County of the Republic of Croatia. The study included two samples. The first sample is teachers and professional associates of 40 primary schools, and the second sample is the parents of students from these same schools so that the results can be compared given the fact that teachers are web site creators. In the introductory part of the survey intended for teachers, the purpose and goal of the research, the importance and contribution of filling out the questionnaire for the improvement of digital communication are presented, and the guaranteed anonymity of the answers is emphasized. The survey contains 22 questions of which two questions are sociodemographic structure (gender and age). Closed-ended questions are a combination of multiple choice, dichotomous, and Likert-based 5-point scale, with a value of 1 (one) indicating complete disagreement or least importance, and 5 (five) indicating complete agreement or maximum importance. The survey contains ten multiple-choice questions in which it was possible to choose only one answer, two dichotomous questions and eight questions compiled according to the principle of the Likert scale. The survey was created in the Google form.

The survey was conducted in the period from January 31 to February 10, 2020 with the consent of primary school principals. A link to the survey was sent to teachers at their official email addresses.

3 RESULTS

The teacher survey was completed by 150 teachers. The survey was completed by 133 female teachers (88.7%) and 17 male teachers (11.3%). Most of them who completed the survey belong to the age groups of 31 to 40 years (37%), 41 to 50 years (29%), 51 to 60 years (20.7%). A very small number of teachers under the age of 30 and over the age of 60 completed the survey (a total of 21 respondents, or 14%). The answers of teachers / professional associates to the question about the frequency of visiting the school website range from “very rarely” to “several times a day”. At the same time, 39% of teachers / professional associates state that they visit the school's website several times a month or once a week, and 38% of teachers / professional associates state that they visit the school's website several times a week or once a day. There is a smaller share of those who do it less often or more often than stated.

Table 1. Frequency of visits to the school website by teachers.

	<i>f</i>	%
very rarely	21	14,0
several times a month	33	22,0
once a week	25	16,7
several times a week	46	30,7
once a day	11	7,3
several times a day	14	9,3
Total	150	100,0

Teachers and professional associates value the importance of publishing a photo of an event with the publication. On a scale of 1 (least important to me) to 5 (most important to me), the average score is 4.15. In addition, the data on the percentage of individual assessments show that more than 80% of teachers / professional associates rated the importance of publishing photos of the event with grades 4 and 5.

Table 2. Teachers' opinion on the importance of publishing photos with the publication.

%					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	2	3	4	5		
2,0	2,7	12,7	43,3	39,3	4,15	0,89

Teachers and professional associates rate the transparency of the school's website quite highly. On a scale of 1 (least clear) to 5 (most clear), the average score is 4.12. In addition, the data on the percentage of individual assessments show that more than 80% of teachers / professional associates rated the transparency of the website with grades 4 and 5.

Table 3. Transparency of the website according to the teacher.

%					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	2	3	4	5		
0,7	0,7	15,3	52,7	30,7	4,12	0,73

The average grades of teachers and professional associates are high for most of the listed characteristics of the website. The importance of the characteristics was assessed on a scale from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). For most of these characteristics, the average rating is higher than 4. The exceptions are “photo presence” for which the rating is slightly lower than 4 and “video content presence” for which the relevance rating is the lowest. The obtained results are also shown in the graph.

Table 4. The importance of website characteristics according to teacher assessment.

	%					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
comprehension of the published text	0,7	2,0	2,0	24,0	71,3	4,63	0,69
publication of news and information on time	0,7	2,0	3,3	27,3	66,7	4,57	0,72
objectivity of the text	0,7	2,7	3,3	28,0	65,3	4,55	0,75
the speed of reaching the desired content	0,7	1,3	2,0	44,7	51,3	4,45	0,67
content of the publication	0,7	2,7	4,0	37,3	55,3	4,44	0,76
the visibility of all the content the site offers	0,0	3,3	4,7	64,0	28,0	4,17	0,66
the presence of photographs	0,7	3,3	18,7	63,3	14,0	3,87	0,71
the presence of video materials	16,0	22,7	43,3	16,7	1,3	2,65	0,98

On average, teachers and professional associates disagree with the statement that a longer publication is also of better quality. The agreement was assessed on a scale from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 5 (I completely agree), and the obtained average grade of teachers / professional associates is 2.15. In addition, the data on the percentage of individual assessments show that 59% of teachers / professional associates gave low grades (1 and 2), and 13% high grades (4 and 5).

Table 5. Teachers' opinion on the dependence of quality and length of publication.

%					M	SD
1	2	3	4	5		
40,7	18,0	28,7	11,3	1,3	2,15	1,12

The majority of teachers / professional associates (86%) consider the publication on the school's website to be concise, with sufficient information. Only 10 respondents (6.7%) believe that the posts for the website are concise and contain too little information.

Table 6. The quality of publications on the website according to the teacher.

	f	%
concise, with enough information	129	86,0
concise, but lacking information	10	6,7
long, with enough important information	7	4,7
long, with too much unnecessary content	4	2,7
Total	150	100,0

The importance of individual elements of the website was assessed by teachers and professional associates on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important). The average grades of teachers / professional associates are more than 3.5 for all the listed elements. They assessed "menu visibility" and "visibility of all elements on the front page" as the most important elements. The obtained results are also shown in the graph.

Table 7. The importance of website characteristics according to teacher assessment.

	%					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
menu transparency	0,0	0,7	1,3	43,3	54,7	4,52	0,56
visibility of the all elements on the cover page	0,0	0,7	4,0	55,3	40,0	4,35	0,59
font size i tipe	0,7	3,3	16,0	61,3	18,7	3,94	0,73
link to other content	0,7	1,3	18,7	64,0	15,3	3,92	0,67
colours	2,0	6,7	18,7	60,7	12,0	3,74	0,83
the amount of monthly/weekly posts	1,3	8,0	34,0	45,3	11,3	3,57	0,85

Teachers / professional associates gave an average high grade (3.9) to the question of the extent to which teachers, as creators of the website, have in mind parents as users. An evaluation scale from 1 (least in mind) to 5 (most in mind) was used. Additionally, the data on the percentage of individual grades show that the majority (72%) of teachers / professional associates gave higher grades (4 and 5), 24% a middle grade, and only 2% a lower grade (1 and 2).

Table 8. Teachers' focus on parents in publications on the website.

%					M	SD
1	2	3	4	5		
0,7	3,3	24,0	48,7	23,3	3,91	0,81

Teachers and professional associates assessed whether the school's website influences the creation of parents' attitudes towards the school from 1 (do not have an impact at all) to 5 (have a significant impact). The obtained average grade of teachers / professional associates is medium high (3.7). In addition, data on the percentage of individual assessments show that 67% of teachers / professional associates gave a high assessment (4 and 5), 26% a neutral assessment, and only 7% a low assessment (1 and 2) of the impact of school websites on parents' attitude creation towards school.

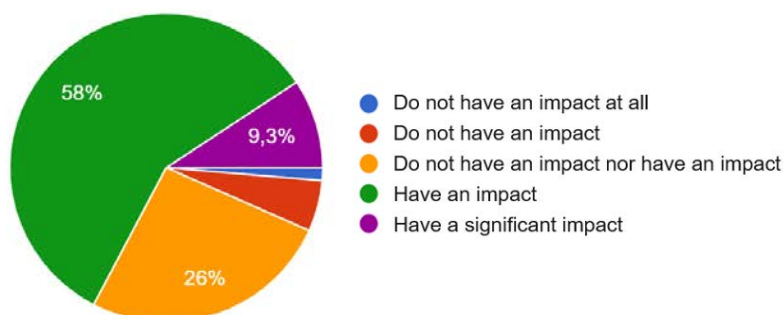


Figure 1. Teachers' opinion on the influence of the website on the creation of parents' attitudes towards school.

When it comes to information related to the school, the majority of teachers / professional associates believe that parents trust the teachers of their school the most (45%) and the principal of their school (23%). Only 10% think that parents trust the school's website the most. A smaller part of teachers / professional associates (5-7%) believe that parents trust groups in applications, social networks or other parents the most.

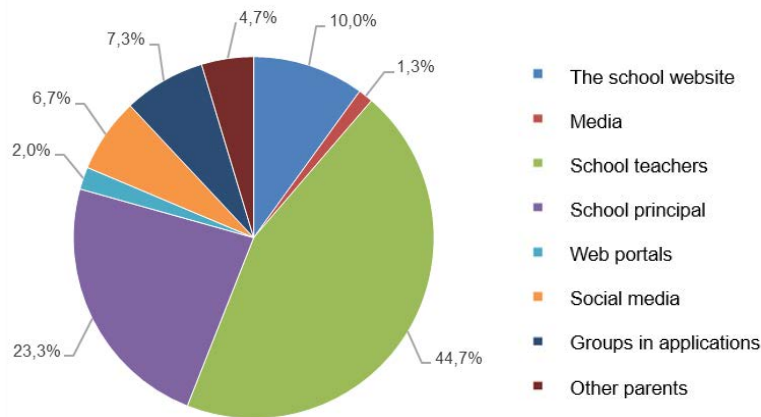


Figure 2. Who do parents, according to the teacher, trust the most.

About half of teachers and professional associates (49%) believe that informing parents on the website is not enough, i.e. that in addition to information on the website, additional written information is needed. 24% of teachers / professional associates think that informing parents about the website is enough, and the rest are not sure.



Figure 3. Teachers' opinion on whether informing parents through a website is sufficient.

3.1 Discussion

The analysis of the results of the conducted empirical research provided insight into whether teachers influence the creation of parents' attitudes towards school through digital communication via the website. Hypothesis 1, which claims that teachers significantly influence the creation of parents' attitudes towards school by conducting research and analyzing the results, has been confirmed. Conclusions were obtained by comparing the results of the questionnaire for parents with the results of the questionnaire for teachers. When asked to what extent teachers are focused on parents as users of the website, 72% of teachers give grades 4 and 5. Most teachers visit the website several times a week or once a day (57%), rating the visibility of the site with a high grade (4.12), posts on websites are considered high quality (86%). The majority of teachers (67%) believe that publications on the website affect the creation of parents' attitudes towards school. From this it can be concluded that teachers have a significant influence on the creation of parents' attitudes towards the school since they are the creators of the information and visual component of the website. Hypothesis 2 argues that most teachers believe that the information component of a website is more important for creating a parent's attitude toward school compared to the visual component. The results obtained by the questions related to this hypothesis show that the hypothesis has been confirmed. Teachers and professional associates give more importance to parents when it comes to content, objectivity, completeness of information and the quality of the text published on the website. It can be concluded that the information determinant of the website is more important for teachers to create an attitude. The importance of factors related to the information component is assessed by teachers with high marks: the importance of comprehensibility of the text (4.63), the importance of objectivity (4.55), the importance of content (4.44). Most teachers do not agree with the statement that a longer publication is also of better quality (59%).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The study involved 150 teachers whose results in some parts of the paper were compared with the results given to the same questions by parents of the same schools, referring to the same website. For the purposes of this research, digital communication with school teachers was achieved. The conducted research provided answers to a research question in the field of digital communication of the school with parents, emphasizing the informational and visual determinants of the website. Unsurprisingly, the results show that the information aspect is more important to teachers, given that they are the creators of all components of the website, fulfilling their basic task - quality and timely information to parents. Teachers believe that parents trust the most in turn: teachers, principals, the website which is an encouraging result that proves that digital communication is a pragmatic way of communicating, but not dominant. It is interesting to compare the results of teachers and parents on whether informing through a website is enough where 39% of parents have to ask for additional information, while 49% of teachers think that informing through a website is not enough. This is a response that is related to their experience because in 32% of cases, parents ask teachers for additional information. Teachers and professional associates in the Republic of Croatia do not have formal knowledge in the field of public relations and there is no continuity in performing this work in schools. For teachers who publish content on school websites, these results can be of great importance as useful guidelines in creating informational and visual solutions.

This paper can be a starting point for deriving theory, for conducting the same or similar research in the field of secondary education, but also for deepening research on some specifics of visual or information elements since research in the field of public relations in education is rare.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Publication of this paper was supported by “E-Learning – Digital Curriculum for Digital Time” project by the University North, so the authors of the article are grateful for substantial support.

REFERENCES

- [1] S. Malović, F. Maletić, *Mass Communication*. Zagreb/Croatia: Golden marketing – Tehnička knjiga, University North, 2005.
- [2] P. Brajša, *The Art of Communicating*. Pula/Croatia: C.A.S.H., 2000.
- [3] M.J. Rouse, S. Rouse, *Business Communications*. Zagreb/Croatia: Masmedia, 2005.
- [4] K. Reardon, *Interpersonal communication – Where Minds Meet*. Zagreb/Croatia: Alineja, 1998.
- [5] Z. Tomić, *Public relations: theory and practice*. Zagreb/Croatia: Synopsis, 2016.
- [6] D. M. Scott, *The New Rules of Marketing & PR*. Zagreb/Croatia: Denona d.o.o. 2009.
- [7] Z. Peruško, *Introduction to the Media*. Zagreb/Croatia: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2011.
- [8] S. Krämer, „Medium as a trace and as a device,“ in *The Empire of Media* (Editor Katunarić, Dražen), pp. 31-48, Zagreb/Croatia, Litteris, 2012.
- [9] H. Stančić, „Principles of digital communication,“ in *Digital Age* (Editor Zgrabljic-Rotar, Nada) p. 65, Zadar/Croatia, University of Zadar, 2011.
- [10] J. Škoda, L. Luić, E. Brlek, „Informational aspects of digital literacy“ EDULEARN2020 Proceedings, pp. 3910-3916, 2020.