

COMMUNICATING MESSAGES OF DENTAL WEBSITES IN ORADEA, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

This research employs content analysis taking dentists' websites in Oradea, Romania as a case study. The content analysis applied here establishes categories within the framework of dentists' websites in Romania, in order to determine content elements that are most commonly used and the use of websites as innovative marketing and communication tools for dentists. More specifically, according to the theoretical background of the study, particular emphasis is given to determine the existence of the general website features, able to distinguish between information or promotion. The study aims to provide a platform consisting of a set of website characteristics in order to provide a regulatory instrument to decision makers to define as clearly as possible the boundaries between information and promotion.

Keywords : information versus promotion, content analysis, dental offices and websites, Oradea, Romania

1. Introduction

If used as a marketing tool, Internet provides a way of connecting 'customers' to 'sellers' in different sectors in health-related services included (Turner, 2008). The research that has taken place in regard to the implementation of marketing activities and in particular the use of websites and social media illustrated that multiple angles that exist for marketing dental offices; the research carried out takes into consideration both dentists' and patients' perspective (Geangu et al., 2010; Romano and Baum, 2015; van de Belt, 2015). The research has shown that not all dentists pay attention to the internet as an innovative marketing tool and they use it to upload their printed material on the internet with not many adjustments to take place (Geangu et al., 2010; Romano and Baum, 2015). The Internet is an interactive medium which brings people together and may allow for communication.

This research adds to the existing literature regarding the way in which marketing activities take place to the dentists in the area of Oradea, Romania. The Internet became very accessible in this country: since 2000, there has increased of 46.13% for those individuals using the Internet in Romania (ITU Statistics, 2014). Of the 21,640,168 Romanian people, 11,178,477 are Internet users; the penetration is 40,63% of the population with the Internet in Romania based on the official statistics (<http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>).

The aim of the research is to examine the characteristics of the website which are significant to make the web page be attractive and useful to the potential patient, in compliance with ethical rules of the health profession. This research is part of a wider research which aims to illustrate the role websites may have in order to attract patients as potential customers of dental offices.

This paper examines Romanian dentists' websites adopting Constantin's model (2014), which seeks to make a comparative analysis of specialized sites simulating the behavior and the interpretation of the non-specialist users, which try to select the virtual offers on the basis of the characteristics of the websites.

This analysis is made within the framework of the elements required to exist on dentists' websites in the French environment; according to the Ordinal Charter applied to professional websites of dentists in France, the development of a website should have basic elements of information (Ordre des Chirurgiens-dentistes, 2012). The strong links established between Romanian dentists and the job offer in the French environment allows us to make inferences for the way Romanian dentists' websites are presented. Romanian doctors have chosen to work permanently or temporarily in France; with few exceptions, all of them regularly return in Oradea, in order to reunite with their family, friends and fellow of craft. Consequently, the professional and administrative information flow takes place so easily between the French and the Romanian dental environment.

The analysis of the Romanian websites through the French grid will allow us to observe the strengths and weaknesses of websites, notice the peculiarities and understand if necessary, the introduction of similar ways of communicating and promoting the profession in the Romanian environment.

2. Background of the research

The first step for an organization that wants to use the Internet is to provide a presence online. By means of sites, every company has access to millions of Internet users, who can communicate any information they want (Grossek, 2006: 205; Ortega Egea, Roman Gonzalez and Recio Menendez, 2015). In a virtual network, a company reduces its marketing costs and promotes products, facilitates its relationship with customers and suppliers, its loyal customers, enhancing in that way, its promotion; in a nutshell, the company turns this into a powerful virtual business relationship. The advantages are indisputable and have the impact of revolutionary changes. Specialists argue that «we are witnessing a revolution of mentalities and behaviors and this development makes possible a velvet revolution patterns, devices and methods of sale and communication» (Claeyssen, 2009: 15).

Medicine is a complex area, and its particular interest is that it exceeds the boundaries of commercial type business. Millions of searches are made daily on the internet about medical issues and information provided has a direct impact on health behavior Internet users. Dentists may benefit from the creation of websites that enable their prospective patients to search online about dental practice (McLeod, 2012). In particular, social media is becoming a way of communication of dental doctors with patients especially because people are using social media and the internet to find information about dental practice (Henry, Monar and Henry, 2012), in the context of an enlarged preoccupation for health.

In accordance with Woodcock and Baum (2015), marketing a medical practice has become necessary in order for practitioners and doctors to be able to inform their prospective patients via social media and internet about their services. Previous research on marketing of dental services has identified brand awareness, service

information, targeting of people, feedback tools as essential items that one interested in employing internet as a way of communication, should take into consideration (Constantinescu-Dobra, 2014).

Therefore, the presence of medicine in cyberspace must be a matter of public interest. Consequently, the websites dedicated to medicine have certain peculiarities and need to satisfy a threefold objective: information, persuasion and efficiency (Jayaratne, Anderson and Zwahlen, 2014).

Our focus in this article is on dentists, especially on private dental offices and the websites where they communicate their messages to their existing and potential customers. Cooperation with customers allows companies to be successful and innovative (Kozioł et al. 2014; Kozioł et al., 2015) and this may be the case with dental offices as well. In order to achieve the role played by information but also the unresolved advertising, a website design must be attractive and original, simple and up to date, to be fully functional and well referenced. Dentists have understood, in part, that the presence in cyberspace is able to bring them a significant number of patients with a significantly reduced cost, as happens with any commercial firm. «Online presence is the key point in the process of communication with customers [...] Where else does the company have the opportunity to earn millions of consumers with a significantly cheaper cost than the traditional forms of advertising than online?» (Grossek, 2006: 210; Claeysen, 2009).

The systematic observation of the virtual medical field illustrates that there are several types of websites: institutional sites, sites of associations (professional or patient) or sites created by physicians individually (van de Belt et al., 2015). If we examine the case of the French space, a European country with a rigorous organizational system, even bureaucratic, we see that there are several agencies that only create websites for dentists (e.g. <http://www.land-dentiste.fr/>; <http://www.praxiskom.fr/>; webdentiste.fr; or denti-site.fr). Regarding the professional websites for dentists, there are certain requirements that must be met both in approach and content, so as to prevent and ban the advertising content that could be generated by commercials, advertising links to commercial sites or advertising.

3. Regulation of websites in the medical field

The sites of dentists - just like all medical sites in general - have primarily an informative and a strong social component. They must express an honorable exercise of the profession of dental peculiarities in accordance with the laws and regulations of the organization. Being a dentist enjoys prestige in society. Therefore, the website reflecting the cabinet work and medical practitioners is a shop window and not a trade counter. Joining the ethical obligations with the interest for a profitable business must lead to a harmonized approach of the website in different countries (Code of Ethics for Romanian dentists, 2010; Ordre des Chirurgiens-dentistes, 2012). According to Article 36 of the Code of Ethics for Romanian dentists "Dentists can provide professional information through the internet, in which must show sincerity, meaning that it meets the current provisions of the Public Health Code. The owner is obliged to notify the College website of the emergence of a new cabinet. S/he is also committed to modify fairness and dignity. When publishing a website, dentists must ensure that the content does not contain misleading or comparative nature information (Code of Ethics for Romanian dentists, 2010). All information on the website must be real, objective and easily verifiable. Any violation of these provisions constitutes misbehavior". This is, in fact, the only official paragraph related to the conception of an acceptable website in this domain. Ethical issues should be mainly taken into consideration for dental practice websites in order to be able to promote online the services they offer and at the same time, follow the regulations and guidelines (Nichols and Hassall, 2011). The influence of national culture plays a significant role in a business's behavior (Abrudan et al., 2010) and dentists are not excluded.

The Charter for designing websites developed by the Ordre des Chirurgiens-dentistes, 2012) - a country with which Romania has been recently associated in regard to dental issues- contains mandatory elements of a certified website for a dental office, the site according to any new recommendations of the Board and in accordance with the observations which would be made by official bodies. The approval of the certified site is conditioned by the College Board for signing commitments to the Charte. Some sites owners put great emphasis on scientific guarantee professional discourse on site certified by an official body - UFSBD (The French Union for oral-dental health) or an ethics committee.

We present in the following paragraphs the items on which we base our analysis of the Romanian sites as this is presented in the literature (Constantin, 2014; Ordre des Chirurgiens-dentistes, 2012). Dentists' websites must follow in France the issues presented below. The website address should be clearly delineated: extension «chirurgiens-dentistes.fr» is a domain name reserved to the Order dentists and guarantees that s/he is enrolled in the College. Identifying the surgeon dentist holding the cabinet site: the information identifying the individual holder is mandatory. Identifying all surgeon dentists working in the office with full name and registration num-

ber in the College are mandatory. Titles and personal qualifications for each physician should also be presented to specialization, titles and functions recognized by the National Council of the College (possibly a link to their descriptions on the official sites of official institutions).

The information about cabinet presentation includes several compulsory elements: phone number, days and hours of consultation. All other employees - nurses, reception operator - must be clearly identified. It is also recommended to publish information on the emergency service organized by the local college and in case of absence it is recommended to indicate the one who replaces or to route to another colleague. Information on the access to the cabinet should appear. The relationship with the Health insurance companies or funds is also advisable to specify. Medical information must be correct and scientifically accurate, complete, current, reliable, pertinent, auctions, understandable, and verifiable. Information source must be specified; it may come from certified medical information sites (e.g. by an entity such as the Foundation Health on the Net), with the respect of the copyright and mention of the date. A link should also be automatically presented to direct to the page that contains the ethical rules and recommendations about new ways of information is mandatory (websites, networks, platforms) and a link to the directory prepared by the medical doctors. All commercial links are prohibited. Form or contact icon: limited to programming for a consultation where the dentist must respond with a confirmation. This form must not contain wording such as «send to friend». It is imperative that patients be advised on the right to their confidentiality. The possibility to book online dental services is another element. Finally, the existence of a newsletter must have an informative and non-advertising content.

4. Methodology - Description of the methodological procedures followed

The authors followed a conceptual research paradigm, as it is the one that presents concepts based mainly on secondary data (i.e. statistical databases, literature, personal theoretical knowledge and so on) and a theory driven approach was followed (Creswell, 1994: 146). The research employed content analysis using a case study design (Yin, 1993). Content analysis is defined as a research technique applied to nonstatistical material that allows the researcher to analyze such material in a systematic manner (Mehmetoglu and Dann, 2003; Finn et al., 2000). It establishes categories and then counts the number of related words, sentences and issues under each category. When content analysis combines both the descriptive and interpretive approaches, then it is not merely a quantification of qualitative text data (Roller, Mathes and Eckert, 1995) and this view is followed in this research.

Therefore, if we ask why they would make a dentist's office or an internet site, we can respond: to present their services and to encourage people to take care of their health, choosing to become patients in a powerful, professional and welcoming cabinet. But communication must be constantly considering specific prohibition on advertising. Where does the line between information and advertising disappear? What are the mandatory contents to meet the criterion of «information»? What are the ways to advertise without actually advertising?

To answer these questions, we thus, content analyzed the online presence of dental offices in Oradea, Bihor county town of residence, located in the northwest of Romania, on the border with Hungary. In the city of Oradea there exist officially 450 dentists in free practice, enrolled in the College of Dental Surgeons in Bihor (Colegiul Medicilor Dentisti din Bihor, 2014) and 100 a quarter of them- have asked the College to suspend their activity in order to continue it abroad, the overwhelming proportion in France. In evaluating the target sites we base our analysis on the French legal system described above in the Charter applied to French professional websites elaborated by the French College of Dental Surgeons (Ordre des Chirurgiens-dentistes, 2012).

Herring (2004) notes that in Computer mediated discourse analysis, sampling is rarely done randomly, since random sampling sacrifices context. In that way, textual analysis can take into consideration ongoing participant observation of online communication. In this particular study, research was based on the 3 sites portals that Romanian dentists use to communicate their cabinets. Based on these portals, <http://www.dentistonline.ro>; <http://www.medicistomatologi.ro>; <http://www.cliniciimplantdentar.ro> and taking into account the Google ranking algorithm for Oradea's dentists' online presences, the authors selected to content analyze those sites from the portals that were in the first 10 positions for a period of more than 5 months since December 2015 (<http://www.seomark.co.uk/how-does-google-rank-websites/>). At the time of writing this paper (May 2015) and for an ongoing period of five months, the authors observed the online presence of these sites that continue to have the same ranking as they had five months ago.

5. The implementation of content analysis –theme categories in the data

Content analysis is widely used in management research (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004) as it provides rich and in-depth accounts on a wide range of topics. According to Neuman (2003: 219) “content analysis

is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text. The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated". In the specific study, the researchers sought words and phrases as they were specified from the themes associated with the Code of Ethics and the Ordinal Charter applied to professional websites of dentists.

Classical thematic analysis focuses on the content of the message and is associated with the systematic gathering and examination of material under sections with a broad theme (Neuendorf, 2002: 24). Subjective categorizations should be avoided, that is why themes are categorized based on the conceptual method, where the researchers analyzed the presence and the repetition of a theme (Bazerman and Prior, 2008). The present study examines dental cabinets in Oradea, Romania. In the specific study, the researchers sought words, phrases as they were specified from the themes or codes associated with the following themes:

- Information about the website address
- Identity of the surgeon dentist holding the cabinet site
- Identify all surgeon dentists working in the office.
- Titles and personal qualifications for each physician
- Cabinet presentation
- Medical information
- Links associated with ethical rules
- Form or contact icon
- Possibility of booking services online
- Newsletter

The content analysis took place in the so called direct way, those words or phrases that are physically present and counted rather than on the latent content which depends on the subjective judgment in order to lead to reliable results (Robson, 2010: 420-421; Leiss et al., 2008). The next section presents the results that emerged under the aforementioned broad categories.

6. Research results - bringing the categories together

The sites' address is extremely heterogeneous and, in some situations, they can induce confusion between personal or institutional sites.

b) Identifying the titular surgeon dentist and all the surgeons in the cabinet. This criterion is generally accomplished, but in some cases, the most important information is missing.

c) The analysis of the information regarding the titles and personal qualifications for each doctor is generally followed, yet, some general physicians choose to replace the presentation format with individual messages. Even if it is forbidden, the CV is sometimes presented in terms of a series of dozens of scientific papers

d) Presentation of the cabinet is one of the key points of the sites but none refers to the ways of access for disabled or if there is a parking; one of the analyzed sites mentions the means of transportation available and provide a benchmark. In terms of cabinet photos, a third of websites show some peculiarities, but others, expose a series of professional even artistic photographs which enhance the written message of the site and give greater confidence to potential patients.

e) The medical information must be correct, complete, current, reliable, pertinent, accurate, understandable and verifiable. Sites often fall into the trap of very specialized data, which shows a very high degree of difficulty for unprofessional. In general, the sites analyzed organize information on large areas of medical specialization: dentistry, orthodontics, dental implants, periodontics, pedodontics, prevention, prosthetics, cosmetic dentistry, endodontics. The sites do not propose newsletters to patients, except one which asks for the patient's email and therefore its acceptance of periodical information.

f) The problem of automatic-links to pages that contain ethical rules or the doctors Yearbook, edited by the medical-dentists is almost totally ignored.

g) In four of the ten sites analyzed, there is no online contact form. Three sites present a simple form.

h) As far as the online agenda is concerned, one site in the virtual environment offers patients the opportunity to schedule a personal agenda, by the respect of publishing rules.

It is an issue of culture in regard to the way professionals operate (Koziol et al., 2013) and improvements can take place.

7. Conclusion

This research illustrated that there is absence of data considered to be the foundation of an accurate medical information to patients without advertising valences. We found that there is space for improvements for most of the websites.

<https://sites.google.com/site/icqqmeas 2015>

The authors recommend to complete the information of official data identification of doctors, especially the registration numbers when joining the county Dental College, pictures and detailed presentation of skills and specializations. It is also required to publish the registration number of the company in the Trade Registry and the identification data of all staff. Another deficient chapter is the one referring to cabinet photographs, tools and work. Regarding medical information, it should be explicitly organized in the form of didactic sheets, available to patients who do not have specialty studies. They must be found at a distinct button and not hidden at other buttons. The cases presented should include only relevant images, clearly explained. Complicated medical situations could include a separate button, explicitly dedicated to professionals. The existence of sites that generally include facilities such as GoogleMaps or on-line Registration Form prove the orientation towards new forms of communication. The multiplication of these facilities by generalizing newsletters and online programming agendas would only confirm the understanding of the virtues of e-marketing, proven in other domains.

Beyond the creative freedom of choice to use or not to use Internet tools, the introduction of a regulatory document for the dentists' sites would help provide a basis for accurate information and limit the any slippage towards commercial advertising.

Further research needs to take place in regard to the way social media for marketing dental practices can be effective (Henry, Monar and Henry, 2012) and whether they are used by dentists in the related region. Healthcare marketing activity and internet marketing activity has become a more important strategy in the last decade for dental providers and the use of websites as an efficient marketing tool for bringing closer patients to dentists.

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