

Empirical Research Regarding the Organizational Communication Performance in the Romanian Tourism Units

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ABSTRACT:

Organizational communication, a highly debated and priority topic at a declarative-theoretical level, is extremely important when it comes to increasing the overall effectiveness of every company's activity. Our scientific research was prompted by the fact that until the present day no study has been undertaken in an area as complex as organizational communication. It is a well-known fact that organizational communication is one of the essential factors in shaping the company culture. Within this context, we aimed at analyzing several aspects referring to the way in which organizational communication takes place and to formulate proposals which would contribute to improving the management of this activity in tourism units in Romania. The research study was undertaken over more than two years, between 2014 and 2017. We interviewed 2478 people, current and/or former customers of tourism agencies in Romania, as well as 1408 tourism agency managers, with the help of two crowdsourcing platforms (<<http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU>> and <http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU> respectively. The results were interpreted econometrically, using the SPSS for Windows and ANOVA programs. Finally, we have formulated several conclusions and proposals, including two models of organizational communication in tourism in Romania (at macro- and at micro- level).

Keywords: digital era, crowdsourcing, customer, tourism, hospitality and leisure industry

JEL Codes: M20, Z30

1. Introduction

The attempts to define communication are so diverse and heterogeneous, that the complexity of its interpretations generates significant confusions and/or even the way in which we perceive what is happening in what we consider to be "reality". Without exception, we perceive and react to this "reality" in our own way. It is most likely that in no other area are there such *highly complex processes taking place in organizations, in social groups in general*, such as in the case of **communication**. At the origin of this complexity, which is so special and unique in its own way, stands the extraordinary dynamics of the evolution of society in the previous century, as well as the multitude of ideas, opinions, perceptions and interpretations, etc., all connected to the essence of *communication*. This also the case with our research study which deals with the organizational communication in tourism units. The digital era has generated a new mentality and new ways of acting, including in the field of tourism (State et Toancă, 2016). In a more and more dynamic world, but characterised by the unpredictable, tourism remains for sure an opportunity, capable of bringing a plus to any country's GDP. (Popescu et State, 2015). During the research study we felt the need to clarify the name of the industry analysed: some call it the *tourism industry*, others the *tourism and*

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hospitality industry. Since most of the beneficiaries of this industry spend a considerable amount of time in various entertainment facilities, making the most of their holidays, we have decided to propose a new name for this industry, a name which I am sure defines and explains in a more accurate manner the specific activities carried out: the ***tourism, hospitality and entertainment industry***. The particularities of organizational communication within this industry are obvious, as they are generated by the heterogeneous situations that its clients are facing or may face. For example, one of the major issues of organizational communication in the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industry is the “gap” between the tourist-receiving units and their clients (who, in our opinion, are improperly called tourists). It is a well-known fact, admitted but not always consistently put into practice, that clients are clients, anywhere in the world. The tourist is someone who travels, be it for pleasure or for personal development (turistinfo, 2017). Clients are much more than mere tourists or passengers (as they appear even in the “nomenclature” of airline companies). The fact that a client becomes loyal is proven by his/her coming back to a tourism unit in which he/she was received before. In reality, however, this is happening very rarely and it is mostly due to the way in which the tourism units in Romania treat their own customers. The “gap” appears because the tourism units are almost never interested (unless, at most, declaratively) and/or never take into account the opinions of their own clients on the quality of the services they were offered (insee, 2017). In order to give tourism units the chance of finding out the opinions of the clients interested in expressing them, as a novelty in the field, we have tackled *crowdsourcing* and its importance both for developing the entrepreneurial spirit in the industry and for improving the decision-making process. According to the specialists, *crowdsourcing* is a “*type of online, participative activity, by which a person, an institution, a non-profit organization or a company proposes to a heterogeneous group of people with different backgrounds, through an open and flexible call, to voluntarily undertake tasks of variable complexity and modularity. The benefit will be mutual: the user fulfils a type of need (economic or social recognition, self-esteem and developing certain personal skills while the crowdsourcer obtains and uses in his/her own interest all the information supplied by the user*” (Estellés-Arolas et Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012, pp.8-9). In terms of target audience, especially in a competitive environment, *crowdsourcing* targets propel and/or groups of people, not collaborators or contractors (as is the case with *outsourcing*). Moving *crowdsourcing* on the internet was justified by the fact that individuals tend to express themselves, speak their mind and take action more freely on a specialized website, since they feel safer without being supervised by third parties. (Smith, Gharaei-Manesh et Alshaikh, 2013, p.23). From the technical point of view, *crowdsourcing* allows managers to identify the latest news in their field of activity and to store them depending on their interests. On the other hand, in order to exchange opinions with clients, the managers can feed specific information to specially created, task-based crowd websites such as, for example, related to the clients’ level of satisfaction with the services they have received. This is done in an operative manner, under the protection of anonymity (Smith, Gharaei-Manesh et Alshaikh, 2013, p.23). According to the specialists (Howe, 2008, p.19; Van Henk, 2010, p.8; Brabham, 2012, pp.27-28), the individuals who use *crowdsourcing* will have a two-fold motivation, both an *intrinsic* one (social interaction, intellectual stimulation through competition, etc.) and an *extrinsic* one (financial gain).

2. Objectives, Methodology, Results

The applied research was carried out between February 2014 and May 2017 and it included the following stages:

1. identifying the actual situation of tourism units records (both tourism agencies and tourist-receiving units) in Romania, formalizing it and establishing the research hypotheses;
2. drawing up and distributing (physically, but especially online, in the crowdsourcing system) two questionnaires regarding:
 - the quality of organizational communication in tourism units in Romania, analysed from the view point of the management of tourism units;
 - establishing the degree of client satisfaction with the quality of organizational communication in tourism units in Romania. To this effect, we have created two websites (<http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU> and <http://www.goo.gl/JUaLx>, respectively), as forms of crowdsourcing, accessible to any individual and/or legal person interested in the analysed topic, depending on one's own options, without any outside pressure and in a confidential manner;
3. collecting the data supplied by the respondents and interpreting it econometrically.

In order to identify the actual situation of the records of tourism units in Romania, formalize it and establish the research hypotheses, we started off from the unacceptable heterogeneity of the statistical data provided by the various media in our country (i.e. National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Tourism, National Tourism Authority, etc.). Within this context, the most important merit of the results of my work with respect to the actual situation of the records of tourism units in Romania is represented by the two statistic situations including both the tourist-receiving units and tourist agencies. We would like to highlight the fact that we have created the first database of tourism units in Romania, which includes 3212 tourist agencies and 10414 tourist-receiving units.

The second sub-stage consisted in establishing the work hypotheses.

The main hypothesis of my study is related to the empirical research activity carried out and it was demonstrated by practice: the decision of choosing a certain tourist destination is mainly influenced by the personal research done by the clients of tourism units and not by the latters' offer reflecting their effective organizational communication.

In my opinion, this situation is generated by the following (these being the secondary hypotheses):

1. there is a low professional level of external organizational communication in tourism;
2. in spite of the strong impact that the implementation of the modern communication technologies has on attracting clients, it does not lead to creating loyal and repeat customers.

As mentioned above, in order to carry out the applied research, we used crowdsourcing and we developed two questionnaires.

- with a view to analyzing the quality of organizational communication in tourism units in our country, we developed a questionnaire which was sent, handed in and/or included on the <http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU> website;
- with a view to establishing the satisfaction level of the customers of tourism units in Romania regarding the latter's organisational communication I developed a second questionnaire which was also handed in and/or included on a special website: <http://www.goo.gl/JUaLx>.

The questions in the two questionnaires were formulated after model questionnaires developed and applied in the field (Fuller, 2000, de Veert, 2007, apud. Deaconu et al., 2014, p.698) and in cooperation with well-known Psychology specialists (university teachers). Each questionnaire included 20 questions.

From the methodological point of view, the respondents' opinion was expressed freely by accessing the specially created websites and not by approaching already known people. After being informed through the social media about the opportunity to interact with the entrepreneurs in tourism units and their customers, the respondents accessed the online platforms offered to them when, how and if they wanted (the time interval for which I checked how much the two websites were accessed is 15 February-30 August 2014). *I would like to mention that these platforms are permanently operational.*

The first questionnaire, offering entrepreneurs and/or tourism managers the opportunity to access the <http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU> configuration, included questions about characteristic aspects:

- general, concerning the organization and the wider organizational communication; within this context, we sought to identify whether the activity was monitored at management level or by specialized departments (e.g. Marketing, Communication and public relations, etc.);
- specific: who and how similar activities were performed and what methods were used to stimulate and facilitate the effective networking of tourism facilities on the one hand, and to ensure the development of professional training of their human resources on the other hand.

This questionnaire was accessed by 1408 entrepreneurs/tourism managers. In over 90% of the cases, those who accessed the online platform did not answer all the questions, which, in my opinion, is not necessarily a limitation of the research. After I performed a very detailed analysis of the responses received, I used the econometric analysis of the results of this first stage of my research. At this point, in terms of methodology, I used the analysis of variance - ANOVA coupled with SPSS for Windows, version 15 and the theory of correlation and linear regression in order to establish the degree of professionalism of organizational communication in tourism facilities.

After consulting the <http://www.goo.gl/sgzjU> crowdsourcing platform and analyzing and interpreting the responses to the first questionnaire on the ways in which the management of tourism organizations addresses organizational communication, I formulated the following considerations:

a) in our opinion, generally speaking, the management of tourism units proves to have an erroneous perception of the role and especially of the mission of organizational communication, which they understand as a simple and banal transmission of information. Practically, the management of many tourism units considers that communicating means (equals) transmitting. Obviously, this situation is not favourable for at least two reasons, namely:

- transmitting information (whether the information is perceived as useful or not) is merely an action meant to communicate with-inform the receivers (customers) of tourism units. I am of the opinion that what matters the most are the results of such action, more precisely enhancing the attractiveness of tourism activities and, implicitly, increasing the loyalty of the tourism units' customers. This loyalty shouldn't be only declared, but also (and especially) proven;
- both the internal and the external organizational communication should trigger actual attitudes and reactions, not only simple declarations of intention. In this sense, we highlight the fact that what matters is

not that (potential) customers should declare themselves satisfied with the outcomes of the organizational communication of tourism units, but to prove their loyalty by returning to the already visited places;

b) although it may seem that 1408 respondents from tourism units is a very big number and even if the *crowdsourcing* method is still in *an implementation proposal stage, to be improved*, we have noticed *the fear and even the reluctance of the tourism units managers when it comes to questionnaires and in general their reluctance to supplying information about the way they run their activity*;

c) referring to the manner in which the managers of tourism units create and promote their image by means of organizational communication, I *have come to the conclusion* that in most cases this is not the responsibility of a specialized department/person, but that of the general manager. When the general manager is exclusively the one who takes on the tasks connected to the external organizational communication, the coefficient of the (F) correlation is lower compared to the situation when there is a specialized department (see Table 1). Statistically, *all the p significance thresholds proved to be relevant*, which led me to the conclusion that the *results can be extrapolated to the organizational reality*. Considering that all the values of p are *statistically significant* ($p \leq 0.05$), the *validity of the main hypothesis* is accepted. Finally, *a lack of knowledge of the surrounding reality or a distorted knowledge of it correlated with a disregard of the customers' feedback generates empiricism and even dilettantism when it comes to taking action*;

Table 1: Sinthesis of the ANOVA results regarding the entrepreneurs/managers of tourism units

Question / choices	Variance source	SS	df	MS	F	p
<i>1. Organisational communication (OC) is the responsibility of:</i>						
- the OC Department	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	32061.266 56465.037 88526.304	4 1403 1407	8015.317 369.053	21.719	.000
- the Sales Department	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	30910.003 48027.927 78937.930	4 1403 1407	7727.501 313.908	24.617	.000
- the Marketing Department	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	32674.120 57595.051 90269.171	4 1403 1407	8168.530 376.438	21.700	.000
- the General Director (Manager)	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	20603.242 52079.296 72682.538	4 1403 1407	5150.810 340.388	15.132	.000
- External partners	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	24188.007 28629.493 52817.500	4 1403 1407	6047.002 187.121	32.316	.000
<i>2. The most used forms of OC</i>						
- Internet	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	66185.687 60399.832 126585.5	1 1402 1403	16546.422 394.770	41.914	.000
- E-mail	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	20540.830 57347.885 77888.715	2 1170 1172	5135.208 374.823	13.700	.000
- Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i>	44226.029 41571.060	4 1272	11056.507 271.706	40.693	.000

	Total	85797.089	1276			
3. Forms of building customer loyalty						
- Telephone or e-mail	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	11318.678 115173.5 126492.2	2 1382 1384	2263.736 757.721	2.988	.013
- Loyalty programmes	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	1442.637 53226.122 54668.759	3 1392 1395	288.527 350.172	.824	.534
- Other forms	<i>Among groups</i> <i>Within the group</i> Total	11388.568 61006.122 72394.690	5 1173 1178	2277.714 401.356	5.675	.000

Source: results of data processing by the author using the ANOVA program

d) referring to the *methods used in the external communication process and their effectiveness*, I have noticed that the majority of tourism organizations in our country consider that *the internet, electronic mail and social media* are the most efficient means of external organizational communication (see Table 1). Since, in all the cases, $p \leq 0.05$, the validity of the main hypothesis is reconfirmed. Likewise, the significant F values have also confirmed the validity of the first secondary hypothesis;

e) regarding *customer loyalty programmes*, the answers received were demotivating. Thus, many managers (497 people, meaning 35.63% of the 1395 respondents) declared that they didn't have such programmes. We have noticed that building customer loyalty is mainly a declarative issue, since many managers in this field of activity are aiming at "surviving" from one year to another;

f) by applying the *theory of correlation and linear regression* I proceeded to analyzing the correlation between the effectiveness of the means of external communication and the situation of the reservations made using some of these by the hosts of tourism units. When *the internet* was used as an external organization communication method, the function is: $y = 0.744709x + 63.03452$; the regression coefficient is very high ($r = 0.989632$), which reaffirms the effectiveness of this means of communication. Finally, although the *internet* has become a very frequently used means in order to establish an effective organizational communication, its utilisation is still in an extremely incipient stage. In case the telephone and electronic mail are used as means of connecting with the environment, ($y = -0.05245x + 289.6183$) and the regression coefficient negative, almost nul ($r = -0.06441$) indicate the low effectiveness and/or even lack of effectiveness of the respective means of communication. Practically, making use of the *electronic mail* by the tourist-receiving units as a means of external communication *does not yield the expected results*. More precisely, we have noticed that *the reservations made by clients by e-mail are a direct, subjective result of their personal decision, after having consulted the websites of the tourist-receiving units and not of the efforts made by the respective organizations to improve their communication with their own customers*. As far as the use of *social media* (Facebook, Twitter etc.) is concerned; $y = 0.189348x + 142.2783$), we have reached the conclusion that since the regression coefficient obtained has an average value ($r = 0.440082$), there is a weak correlation between the organizational communication efforts to create efficient links with the customers and the onsite reality. Using *social media* as a means of attracting and/or even of creating loyal customers cannot have a high effectiveness, because one cannot build a communication strategy and further on a sustainable and viable

relationship with the customers by accessing certain websites where anyone can intervene whenever and however they wish and where no information can be scientifically verified.

Besides having the main hypothesis reconfirmed, the validity of the two secondary hypotheses has also been confirmed, namely: (1) there is a low degree of professionalism in the external organizational communication in tourism; (2) however strong, the impact of implementing the modern technologies on attracting clients does not result in customer loyalty;

During the second stage of our applied research, also with a help of a questionnaire, we went on to analyse the perception of tourism units clients regarding the quality of the organizational communication of the tourism units, from the perspective of the degree of satisfaction with the services they had benefited from. The aims of my research were: (a) to reconfirm the main hypothesis (the decision of choosing a certain tourist destination is mainly influenced by the personal research done by the clients of tourism units and not by the latters' offer, reflecting their effective organizational communication ; (b) to verify the secondary hypothesis: generally, the customers declare themselves dissatisfied with the quality of the external organizational communication of tourism units, which is stemming from the discrepancy between what they had seen before going to their chosen destinations and the on site reality, once they arrived there.

As a work method we used the questionnaire available at <http://www.goo.gl/JUaLx>, in the crowdsourcing system. The questionnaire included questions with a general character (related to the respondent and the frequency with which he/she travels in-country and abroad, as a tourist or for professional reasons) and a specific character (regarding the information provided to the customers about the tourism units where they will be accommodated, on the one hand, and the perception of national customers about the quality of the external organizational communication of tourism units, according to various criteria, such as: the professionalism shown by the specialized human resources, as perceived by the clients at least in terms of their attitude; the interest in making loyal customers; how the services compare with the ones they received in other countries; the means considered to be adequate in order to improve the effectiveness of the activity of tourism units, etc.).

The number of respondents who voluntarily accessed the specialized crowdsourcing website proposed was considerable: 2478. The results of the research carried out have revealed that Romanian tourism units are still far from what one may call "the client cult" and/or the culture of meeting customer wishes in the most complete, complex and diverse manner, even by anticipating them.

Conclusions

The conclusions on the level of satisfaction of the customers of tourism units cover two levels:

1. General conclusions (at regional, zonal or national level):

- the research hypotheses were validated by the econometric results obtained. As such, it is confirmed once again that the choice of a tourist destination is decisively influenced by the personal research done by the clients of tourism units and not by their offer, formulated as a result of effective external organizational communication. On the other hand, the hypothesis according to which customers are generally dissatisfied with the quality of the external organizational communication was also confirmed. This is caused by the discrepancy between what they see before their departure to the chosen destinations and the on site realities they are confronted with once they arrive there;

- the clients' negative perception about the quality of the organizational communication of tourism units is mainly generated by the lack of the ROMANIA brand. In this respect, it seems to us that what would be extremely important is, on the one hand, a more effective cooperation between the tourist-receiving units and the tourist agencies and, on the other hand, that the external organizational communication should focus on our country's brand, on its image abroad;
- the dissatisfaction of the customers of tourism units is "fuelled" by a lack of national strategy in promoting Romanian tourism as a whole and not like a sum of tourist-receiving units. The tourists' dissatisfaction is equally fuelled by the lack of a national strategy for creating customers who are loyal to the ROMANIA brand.

2. Specific conclusions (at tourism unit level):

- the customers' negative perception about the quality of organizational communication of tourism units is also induced by the mismatch between what the latter are promoting in the public space (through the mass-media, social media, etc.) and the reality that the clients are faced with on site. The fact that the clients' decision to choose a certain destination is generally prompted by their own research on the social media or by the discussions with friends/acquaintances can only bring huge disadvantages to the tourism units. An eloquent proof in this sense is the reservation expressed by the clients when it comes to requiring the services of certain tourism operators, and their preference for informing themselves about their future destinations;
- the tourism units don't have customer loyalty programmes, unless, at most, at a declarative level. In spite of the managers' declaration of principle regarding the importance of customer loyalty, the facts prove that it all amounts to simple declarations of intention which are not accompanied by effective operational measures. This is one of the major causes why, for example, at the Romanian seaside the percentage of loyal Romanian customers (in case they exist) is of 10%-15% on average. Comparatively, on the eastern coast of Spain, the percentage of such clients is of 70-75% (Garcia-Sanchez, 2015, pp.132-133), and they represent "the major life resource" of tourism operators; Practically, in our opinion, organizational communication is understood by the tourism units more like a matter of principle than like an opportunity for increasing the satisfaction of their customers with the services that they benefited from.

Proposals

A. Proposals for improving the organizational communication at the macro (national) level:

A.1: developing and disseminating the ROMANIA brand, as part of a national strategy for the promotion of Romanian tourism;

A.2: creating and promoting tourist brands at zonal, regional and local level;

A.3: developing unitary statistic records at national level including the situation of the tourism units in Romania (classified and not classified). This way, at the beginning of every year, the line minister would be able to publish the complete lists of the tourist operators (accommodation units and travel agencies) which are authorized to perform their activity in this field. Thus, the misunderstandings that sometimes appear could be avoided and, most

importantly, the fraudulent actions of certain “tourist agents” could be prevented and/or fought against, along with fiscal evasion;

A.4: the websites which advertise for tourism units should be periodically inspected and in case deviations from the marketing deontological rules are noticed, the responsible ones should be severely sanctioned;

A.5: in parallel with speeding up the procedures for the promulgation of the Law on Tourism in Romania (the current law is 10 years old), the tourism operators should be obliged by law to treat the tourists as customers. Introducing the notion of CUSTOMER in the legislation in force will generate far more obligations on the part of the tourist services providers and will lead to a considerable increase in the attention paid to the quality of the services offered;

A.6: creating a crowdsourcing platform at national level, accessible to all the tourism operators and to all their clients. The purpose of such an initiative is, on the one hand, that of knowing the clients' opinion better, through the feedback offered by them on a voluntary basis and, on the other hand, a better external organizational communication (by means of exchanging information, opinions and good practice, etc.) among all the entities which participate in organizing specific activities of the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industry. Therefore, crowdsourcing can become a very viable tool for developing entrepreneurship in the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industry, while the managers and/or the entrepreneurs should motivate their own clients to participate in crowdsourcing;

A.7: developing a Deontological Guide of tourism operators;

B. Proposals aimed at improving organizational communication at micro level (tourism units):

B.1: the periodic organization (at least once a year) of sessions having as a purpose the in-service professional training of managers in the tourism industry, along with the evaluation of their professional competences;

B.2: spreading the practice of organizing thematic info-trips;

B.3: setting up intranet and extranet networks;

B.4: setting up a crowdsourcing-type of network for each tourism unit;

B.5: increasing and reinforcing the cooperation among the tourist-receiving units and the tourist agencies;

B.6: promoting the image of each resort/town/administrative-territorial unit as part of the ROMANIA national brand.

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