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СЕТЕВЫЕ PR-ТЕХНОЛОГИИ В ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫХ УЧРЕЖДЕНИЯХ**INTERNET PUBLIC RELATIONS AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS****З. Видера¹, П. Сарна²
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Аннотация. Статья носит теоретико-эмпирический характер. Теоретическая часть представляет возможности способов коммуникации учреждений образования в деятельности, связанной с публичными релейшнз при использовании сети Интернет. Эмпирическая часть представляет анализ результатов исследований Интернет-витрин начальных, средних и гимназических школ в 19 городах на правах повята в Силезском воеводстве.

Abstract. This paper is of a theoretical and empirical nature. The theoretical part presents the possibilities of the communication methods in public relations that use the Internet where both non-individualized and individualized communication is applied. The empirical part presents an analysis of the research of the websites of primary, lower-secondary (gimnazjum) and upper-secondary schools in 19 cities in the Silesian Province (Voivodship) of Poland.

Ключевые слова: Связи с общественностью в сети Интернет, коммуникация учреждений образования как организация публичных услуг, публичности (publicity).

Keywords: Internet Public Relations, educational institutions, communication of educational institutions as public services organizations, publicity.

1. Introduction

A legitimate starting point for reflections upon Polish Internet Public Relations is 1991 when Poland joined the European Internet (September) and then was connected to the US network (December). During the first few years after joining the global network the use of the Internet in activities of different institutions was limited. The knowledge of this new communication medium was also poor. A significant increase in the number of companies present on-line is noticed from the mid-nineties of the 20th century. An attempt to define the term "Internet Public Relations", in regards to the specific Polish reality, standards and experiences, was made by Monika Kaczmarek-Śliwińska who points out that Internet PR is: "The management function that allows communication between an enterprise and its external and internal environment, of a continuous and planned character, by means of Internet tools"⁶.

The nature of the presented research has been determined by the necessity to address these problems associated with the presence of schools' services on the Internet and the question related thereto about the functions served by those websites. Today, the Internet provides opportunities not only for presenting a school at relatively low costs but also for interactive contact. This paper is of a theoretical and empirical nature. The theoretical part presents the possibilities of the communication methods in public relations that use the Internet where both non-individualized and individualized communication is applied. The empirical part presents an analysis of the research of the websites of primary, lower-secondary (gimnazjum) and upper-secondary schools in 19 cities in the Silesian Province (Voivodship) of Poland.

⁶ M. Kaczmarek-Śliwińska: *Internet public relations. Polskie realia działań public relations w sieci*, Politechnika Koszalińska, Koszalin 2010, p. 13.



2. Literature review

2.1. Polish experiences in Internet PR

Today, knowledge and skills to use the Internet's instruments are undoubtedly a necessity for public relations specialists. Cooperation with mass media through the network has developed dynamically. Knecht points to new publicity opportunities which are based on the following grounds:

1. Internet press agencies - external networks for media services; "corporate press offices" providing all the materials the media may need (like information designed for the press only; management statements, annual/quarterly reports; interviews, photographs etc.).

2. Providing the press with information through information agencies that manage special on-line services.

3. "On-line publicity" - through on-line versions of magazines; the Internet also provides an opportunity to distribute information directly in a target environment, e.g. by publishing news addressed to particular segments of receivers and other opinion-forming groups and centers - potential investors, clients, lobbyists (computer notice boards, discussion groups, information services, mailing lists, etc.).⁷

PR uses various ways of communication, also in the Internet where both non-individualized (e.g. websites) and individualized (e.g. e-mails) communication is applied. The aim of a non-profit organization's communication efforts is to create and maintain the sense of being bound with others, which allows it to fulfill its organizational goals better. In this case, communication is understood as creating a community. Through it, it is possible to gain various forms of support, financial as well as to attract people willing to cooperate. This enables organizations to realize their set goals more effectively. Also, thanks to the sense of being bound together, it is easier to create common attitudes towards a certain cause and to exchange information (communication as interaction). When planning a communication process, one needs to consider its course (e.g. the known Lasswell formula of five communication components may be helpful: Who says What, in What Channel, to Whom and with What Effect)⁸. Supporting a rational PR policy based on the use of the most effective Internet instruments (besides Internet websites other tools like forums, chats or blogs are also important) allows an organization to monitor its effectiveness⁹.

According to Konikowski, among the promotion strategies which may be carried out on-line, three are generally available:

- passive – this involves only the development of a website which, by itself, is to attract interested visitors,

- active - involves activities that lead to maintaining contact with the persons who have visited a website (distribution of information via electronic mail, participation in discussion lists etc.),

- individualized messaging - reaching specific persons with individualized information¹⁰.

According to the authors of available publications, a properly constructed and managed Internet service should be:

- credible - all information on the website (in the service) is always up-to-date (the date is provided) and based on reliable sources, if possible we provide the source and the author of the information; the website publishes e-mails of the persons responsible, preferably containing names, enabling the recipients to initiate a contact (anonymous websites are not considered as reliable),

- stylish - it has a balanced, esthetically pleasing graphic design, light enough not to increase service download time; the look of the webpage is an important prerequisite for success,

- friendly - with easy and intuitional navigation system, clear structure and properly selected font,

- technically correct - properly selected coding standard for Polish signs (ISO-8859-2), the coding is compliant with HTML W3C standard specification¹¹.

Tarczydło remarks that in recent years we can observe various trends in Internet activities (whisper and viral marketing), as well as the fast development of social media. Also, one needs to consider that there are different types of social networking services with different users and thus, of a different nature (general or addressed to certain social groups, which are focused on sharing specific content). The functioning of city and municipal Internet websites in the Silesian Voivodship has been studied by Szostok who, after considering the groups of functions (informative and utility, promotional, interactive) performed by those webpages came to the conclusion that the relatively best realized function is the informative and utility one, while an opportunity for interaction is the most neglected¹². A nation-wide research project (Kozub-Kulik, n.d.) revealed that the

⁷ Z. Knecht: *Racjonalne public relations. Budowa działu, instrumenty, studia przypadków*, CH Beck, Warszawa 2005, pp. 89-90.

⁸ M. Koszembar-Wiklik: *Internet w komunikacji organizacji non-profit*, in: *Public relations. Skuteczna komunikacja w teorii i praktyce*, ed. H. Przybylski, Akademia Ekonomiczna, Katowice 2006, p. 248.

⁹ M. Kaczmarek-Słowińska: *Internet public relations*. Op. cit., p. 139.

¹⁰ J. Konikowski: *ABC marketingu on-line*, „Internet” 1999, No. 1, p. 52.

¹¹ J. Szyfter: *Public Relations w internecie*, Helion, Gliwice 2005, p. 37.

¹² P. Szostok: *Konwergencja mediów na przykładzie funkcjonowania miejskich i gminnych portali internetowych w*



best performed functions, in general, are the informative and consultative ones (the following functions were evaluated: informative, consultative, service and promotional). In the light of such results one can assume that the possibilities of the Internet for conducting communication policy are not fully utilized. The functioning of school websites (financed by local governments) in the Silesian Voivodship fits into this wider context¹³.

2.2. Internet PR in schools

A public relations plan for an educational institution may involve many objectives such as: gaining parents' attention due to the necessity of attracting such a large number of students that would ensure the school's existence; winning the favorable attitude of opinion-forming environments, public institutions, and potential sponsors. To attract and retain highly qualified teachers as well as improve the atmosphere in a school is also the matter of a well-developed action plan.

Both PR functions - internal and external can be used in educational institutions. The following target groups are classified by Koszembar-Wiklik (2004) as priorities:

1. Parents and children from the school's closest neighborhood - one of the more important reasons for choosing a school is its reputation (the high competencies of the teaching staff, including achievements in olympiads and competitions, infrastructure, safety).
2. Students and alumni - they shape the school's reputation to a large degree.
3. Teachers - winning and keeping a competent didactic staff should be one of the supreme objectives of public relations activities in educational institutions.
4. Sponsors - schools themselves must select a potential group of sponsors according to various criteria, not only financial but also considering the matter of prestige on both sides.
5. Local authorities - decisions regarding financial support or school liquidation belong to local authorities, thus maintaining good relationships with them may be of key significance.
6. The media - not without reason is it called "the Fourth Estate" - it is worth maintaining constant contact with them, which may be especially helpful in crisis situations.
7. Educational authority - this is a body that exercises supervision over schools and often mediates in certain disputes, thus it is worthy to constantly be aware of a school's good reputation¹⁴.

Today, the Internet provides vast opportunities for presenting schools at low costs; it also enables a two-way information transfer. Thanks to the use of the network it is easier and faster to deliver information to the most important target groups. However, one also needs to remember that in these institutions there are many barriers to public relations activities. They include, for example, the formal framework of acting resulting from the schools' status as public institutions (fixed hierarchical structures) as well as other limitations connected with insufficient financial support for education and its dependence on local governments, the lack of initiative of some directors and didactic staff, the hindering initiatives of parents and teachers, poor cooperation between schools, and the low competencies of personnel in this area¹⁵. The problems that modern schools and teachers face nowadays, with the latter to be the supposed creators of educational space, evoke (like never before) the necessity to hold incommensurably higher competencies of various types - communication or cultural. Thus, it is very important for both, young Internet users as well as teachers, to be equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills in the area of media education. Alongside the recognized form of digital exclusion another one emerges and this basically involves the lack of proper knowledge on how to use new technologies.

The research conducted among a group of teachers in 2012 (Sarna, Sarna, 2014) revealed that they were more likely to notice the threats rising from the development of new technologies rather than their positive influence on the development of young people. Such observations seem disturbing. Although one should not underestimate the danger, it is worth remembering that new information and communication technologies provide the opportunity to create and perfect the instruments that support the development and education of children and youth. Moreover, using modern multimedia solutions may significantly increase the attractiveness of education¹⁶.

In response to the presented problem regarding students and teachers and their use of information and communication technologies in education, a governmental "Digital School 2012-2013" program ("Cyfrowa

województwie śląskim, in: *Konwergencja mediów masowych i jej skutki dla współczesnego dziennikarstwa*, vol. 2, eds. M. Gierula, P. Szostok, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2012, pp. 159-162.

¹³ B. Tarczydło: *Budowanie wizerunku marki organizacji przy wykorzystaniu Facebooka*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego 2012, No. 30, p. 124.

¹⁴ M. Koszembar-Wiklik: *Public relations organizacji non-profit na przykładzie szkoły podstawowej*, in: *Public relations. Sztuka skutecznej komunikacji w teorii i praktyce*, red. H. Przybylski, Akademia Ekonomiczna w Katowicach, Katowice 2004, pp. 180-181

¹⁵ M. Koszembar-Wiklik: *Internet w komunikacji...*, op. cit., pp. 180-183.

¹⁶ A. Sarna, P. Sarna: *Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań i zagrożeń współczesnej mediosfery*. W: *Súčasn  aspekty pedagogickej profesie*, red. M. Dupkalov  , T. Hud kov  , I. I tvan. Fakulta Humanitn ch A Pr rodn ch Vied Prešovskej Univerzity v Prešove, Prešov 2014, p. 43.

szkola 2012-2013”) has been launched. It is aimed at developing the competencies of students and teachers in using information and communication technologies (ICT): “The program/pilot program is carried out by the Polish Ministry of National Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Administration and Digitization, the national Center for Development of Education (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji), the Educational Research Institute (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych), voivods - provinces and school governing bodies. The program is preceded by the pilot undertaking for the planned long-term governmental program for the development of the use of ICT competencies among students and teachers (www.cyfrowaszkola.men.gov.pl)¹⁷.

3. Methods

3.1. Research tools

The research was explorative in nature. It was aimed at determining the functions of Internet websites of schools in the Silesian Voivodship. During the analysis a categorization key¹⁸ was used that included the following components significant from the perspective of function:

- **Current events** – a calendar of events taking place in the school, the local area and the school’s history.

- **Students’ affairs** - downloadable documents useful for students such as the school’s statutes, school trips’ rules of procedure, class schedules.

- **Search engine** - which allows for smooth navigation within the services, especially those which are more complex and frequently updated.

- **For parents** - information and documents addressed to parents such as a meeting calendar, textbooks, school year structure, e-log, information on the parents’ committee, additional activities, insurance.

- **Enrollment** - information addressed to prospective students, their parents and guardians.

- **For employees** - information and documents addressed to employees such as the regulations on social benefits, training, job openings,

- **Photo gallery** - access to purposefully selected (as for the theme or general attractiveness) photographs,

- **Access to an on-line school newsletter, chronicles or blog.**

- **Different language versions** – a component significant due to the opportunity of promoting the school abroad,

- **Successes / Future plans** – the school’s vision, awards, advantages, certificates, cooperation with other entities, information about media coverage (“they wrote about us”),

- **Interactive contact opportunities** - through social media profiles (Facebook, Nasza klasa, Youtube), forum (guest book), survey questionnaires, electronic E-Puap day-book or a contact window.

The components were grouped in the following categories corresponding with the three functions:

- **Informativeness / functionality** – a group of factors related to enabling the access to basic information about a school and its nearest surroundings. The following components of schools’ websites were included: current events; students’ affairs; a search engine; for parents; for employees - 5 factors in total.

- **Promotion** - this group included the components that are addressed rather to people from outside, aiming at peaking interest in a given school, as well as to the people already connected with the school (students, parents, alumni) in order to build identification with the institution. This group consists of the following components: a photo gallery; an on-line newsletter, a chronicle or thematic blog; various language versions of the websites, successes / future plans - 5 factors in total.

- **Interactive character** - this function is connected with enabling two-way contact. It may be supported by the following: social media plug-ins - currently popular ones like: Facebook, Nasza Klasa, Youtube have been selected; forum/ guest book; on-line questionnaires, electronic E-Puap day-book or a contact window - also 5 components in total.

3.2. Research sample

The analysis involved the websites of primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools in the following 19 cities in the Silesian Voivodship: Jaworzno, Świętochłowice, Zabrze, Chorzów, Siemianowice Śląskie, Gliwice, Myslowice, Ruda Śląska, Żory, Bytom, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Katowice, Piekary Śląskie, Jastrzębie-Zdrój, Sosnowiec, Tychy, Bielsko-Biała, Rybnik, Częstochowa. In total, 114 websites were analyzed (the services of two schools of each level from each city were randomly selected). The research was conducted in December 2014.

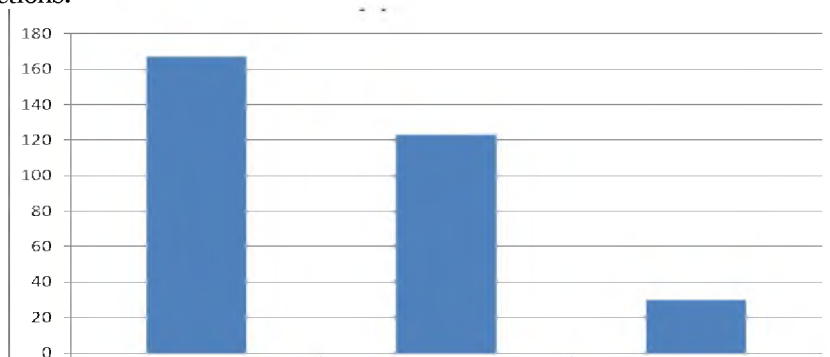
¹⁷“Digital School 2012-2013” program, <http://www.cyfrowaszkola.men.gov.pl/index.php/informacje-o-programie>

¹⁸ P. Szostok: *Konwergencja mediów... op. cit.*, pp. 159-162.

4. Results and Discussion

The functionality of the websites

Research results show that the websites of all types of schools perform an informative function and the differences among them in this regard are not significant. Slightly more diversification was observed in case of the two other functions.



Legend:

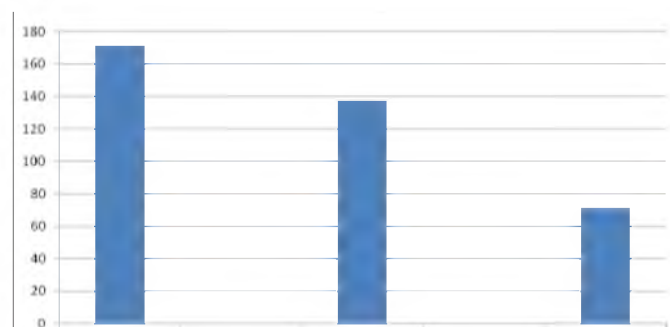
1. Informative function
2. Promotion function
3. Interactive function

Fig. 1. The functions of the websites - primary schools
Source: authors' own compilation based on research results

18 primary schools' (SP) websites (Fig. 1) turned out to be performing the informative function fully, that is, they received five points in the evaluation of this functionality. Schools from the following cities are in this group: Zabrze (SP No. 42), Chorzów (SP No. 14), Siemianowice (SP No. 11), Gliwice (SP No. 1 and 9), Ruda Śląska (SP No. 14), Żory (SP No. 3), Bytom (SP No. 3), Dąbrowa Górnicza (SP No. 3), Katowice (SP No. 1), Katowice (SP No. 1 and 11), Jastrzębie Zdrój (SP No. 1 and 11), Tychy (SP No. 1 and 22), Bielsko-Biała (SP No. 1), Częstochowa (SP No. 24). 17 webpages received 4 points each, whereas 2 websites received 3 points each.

Two primary schools' websites (SP No. 3 in Żory and SP No. 24 in Częstochowa) fully realize the promotion function, receiving the maximum of 5 points, 15 webpages received 4 points each, 12 sites gained 3 points each, 7 received 2 points each and 1 website got 1 point.

None of the schools received the maximum of 5 points regarding the interactive function. 4 schools (SP No. 1 in Świętochłowice, SP No. 1 in Gliwice, SP No. 1 in Dąbrowa Górnicza, SP No. 12 in Katowice and SP No. 11 in Jastrzębie Zdrój) received 2 points each in this category, which was the highest result. 19 received 1 point, while 14 webpages did not get any points at all.



Legend:

1. Informative function
2. Promotion function
3. Interactive function

Fig. 2. The functions performed by the websites - lower-secondary schools (gimnazjum)
Source: authors' own compilation based on research results

Among the lower-secondary schools' (Gim.) webpages (Fig. 2) 18 fully performed the informative function, receiving the maximum of 5 points. This group contains the schools from the following cities: Świętochłowice (Gim. No. 1 and 5), Zabrze (Gim. No. 12 and 20), Chorzów (Gim. No. 2), Ruda Śląska (Gim. No. 3), Żory (Gim. No. 4), Bytom (Gim. No. 1 and 9), Dąbrowa Górnicza (Gim. No. 1), Piekary Śląskie (Gim. No. 2),

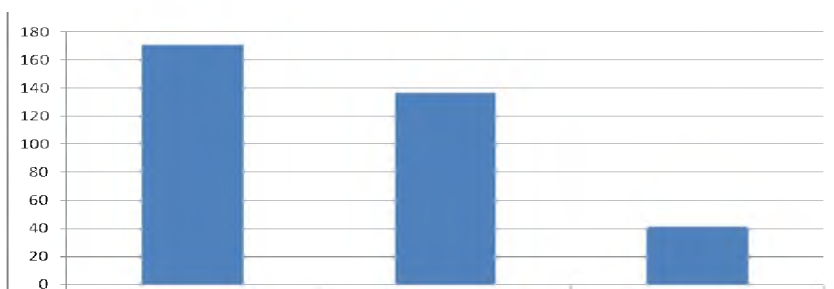


Jastrzębie Zdrój (Gim. No. 8), Sosnowiec (Gim. No. 16), Tychy (Gim. No. 4), Bielsko-Biała (Gim. No. 9), Rybnik (Gim. No. 18), Częstochowa (Gim. No. 1 and 4). 19 webpages received 4 points each and one got 3 points.

The promotion function of the websites was performed fully by 7 websites that received the maximum of 5 points: Dąbrowa Górnicza (Gim. No. 1 and 10), Katowice (Gimn. No. 2), Bielsko-Biała (Gim. No. 11 and 19), Częstochowa (Gim. No. 1 and 4). 11 webpages received 4 points each, 17 websites received 3 points each and 2 received two points each in this category.

As for the interactive function, none of the lower-secondary school websites received the maximum of 5 points and the highest number of 4 points was given to 2 schools: Gim. No. 5 in Świętochłowice and Gim. No. 9 in Bielsko-Biała. 9 webpages received 3 points each, 13 websites received 2 points each and 9 got 1 point each. 6 web-services did not receive any points in this category.

As for the upper-secondary schools' (LO) webpages, 19 of them received the maximum of 5 points in the evaluation of this category. This group includes the schools from the following cities: Jaworzno (1 LO), Świętochłowice (1 LO i 2 LO), Zabrze (1LO, 2 LO), Chorzów (1 LO), Siemianowice (1 LO), Gliwice (3 LO, 5 LO), Bytom (1 LO), Dąbrowa Górnicza (1 LO, 2 LO), Piekary Śląskie (1 LO), Jastrzębie Zdrój (1 LO), Bielsko-Biała (1 LO and 3 LO), Rybnik (3 LO), Częstochowa (1 LO and 4 LO). In turn, 19 webpages received 4 points each.



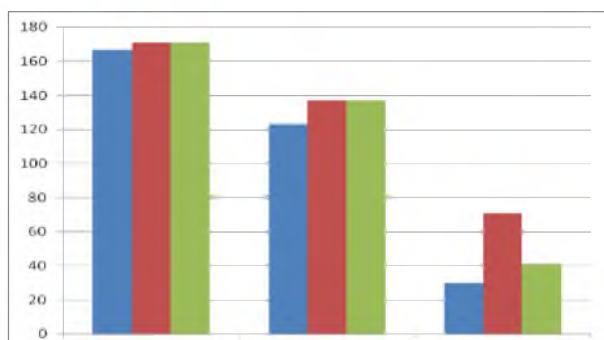
Legend:

- 1. Informative function
- 2. Promotion function
- 3. Interactive function

Fig. 3. The functions performed by the websites - upper-secondary schools (liceum)
Source: authors' own compilation based on research results

The promotional function of the websites was fully performed by 5 websites (Fig. 3) which received the maximum of 5 points. This group includes the schools from the following cities: Świętochłowice (2 LO), Siemianowice (1 LO), Gliwice (3 LO and 5 LO) and Myslowice (1 LO). 16 webpages received 4 points each, 15 websites received 3 points each and one got 1 point in this category.

As for the interactive function, similar to the primary and lower-secondary schools, none of the upper-secondary school websites received the maximum of 5 points. One school received 4 points (1 LO in Żory) which was the highest score, also one (3 LO in Rybnik) received 3 points. 9 websites received 2 points each, 12 got 1 point each and 14 did not receive any points.



Legend:

- 1. Group - informative function
- 2. Group - promotion function
- 3. Group - interactive function

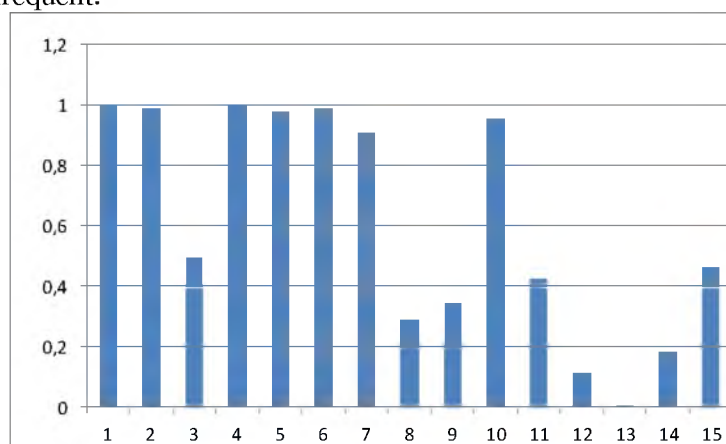
Blue colour - primary schools
Red colour - lower-secondary schools (gimnazjum)
Green colour - upper-secondary schools (liceum)

Fig. 4. The Functions performed by the websites of primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools - summary
Source: authors' own compilation based on research results



The summary (Fig. 4) shows that the interactive function is the weakest point of the websites of all three types of schools in the Silesian Voivodship. It is realized the most in lower-secondary school services and the least in primary schools. Lower-secondary schools, but also upper-secondary ones, care more about the promotional function than primary schools. In all types of schools the most important, as the most performed, is the informative function.

Regardless of the classifying of certain components of the websites to the functional categories and types of schools, we need to point out that the most frequently present functionalities (Fig. 5) are information about schools, students' affairs, the recruitment process, information addressed to parents and employees and photo galleries. Internet sites are available in other language versions less frequently, whereas on-line questionnaire surveys are very seldom used. Plug-ins to social networking services and on-line contact forms are more frequent and websites equipped with such functionalities as a search engine are relatively frequent.



Legend:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 - about the school | 9 - access to an on-line school newsletter, chronicle or blog |
| 2 - students' affairs | 10 - successes / future plans |
| 3 - a search engine | 11 - fb/nk/ youtube |
| 4 - for parents | 12 - a guest book |
| 5 - for employees | 13 - survey questionnaires |
| 6 - enrollment | 14 - an electronic e-puap day-book |
| 7 - a photo gallery | 15 - a contact window |
| 8 - different language versions | |

Fig. 5. The functionalities of the websites of primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools - summary
Source: authors' own compilation based on research results

Schools usually have no possibility to create a complex system of visual identification due their limited budget. This is a consequence of their financial dependency on local governments. As has been pointed out, thanks to the use of the Internet it is possible to present institutions at a relatively low cost. It is worth adding that some schools, in order to attract and direct their receivers' attention, also use various ways which have not been listed in this paper or have only been signaled. Having their own logo is important for schools (however, including this element in the research would require checking if all logo components found on a website align with the official school emblem). Schools also use slogans of different types, such as: "School is our second home", "A school with character", "A school like home and studying without limits", "The school welcomes you on-line", "The best under the sun - Your school", "Our school is likeable - we have been educating for 100 years!!!", "Each student is different, but each one matters equally to us", "Number one. The only such gimnazjum".

5. Conclusion

The conducted analysis of 114 Internet websites of three types of schools allows the researchers to formulate conclusions regarding their functionality. Informativeness / functionality, the group of factors related to enabling the access to basic information about a school and its nearest surroundings is particularly important in all types of schools. This may be connected with aiming at creating such an image that is based on tradition - basically each institution exposes its history and origins in the first place. It would be difficult, however, to recognize the promotion function as neglected, especially in the case of lower- and upper-secondary schools. Besides, some institutions include such functionalities on their websites that may prove their particular orientation towards a specific target group. The possibilities



of interactive contact with users are utilized to a small extent which may be connected with the already mentioned limitations. The latter results from the specifics of schools functioning, not only in the Silesian Voivodship but elsewhere in Poland.

Schools in the Silesian Voivodship do not form an integrated system of visual identification, the autonomy [or 'the complete autonomy'] of the institutions is apparent. This results from their financial dependence on the local governments with the concurrent lack of clear status in the information policy of the territorial authorities in this scope. More general conclusions would, however, require extended research to be conducted.

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