QUALITY OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION SERVICES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

This study discusses the quality of online communication services from the perspective of public administration. Earlier studies show that provision of electronic services has been highly successful in the public sector, where tasks generally have a lower degree of complexity. Most public administration bodies have been committed to providing high quality customer-oriented e-services. Now, the quality in public administration services is highly demanded by citizens, and mainly by users of online communication services, which requires transparency, efficiency and efficacy of these services.

Keywords: *Quality of Electronic Services, Online Communication, Public Administration, Citizens*

JEL classification: *Z18, Z19*

1. Introduction

Online public services are significant in today's economy, and the orientation towards the quality of online services/applications is an integral part of public administration reform to improve its efficiency.

Higher quality of online communication services by quick development of information technology and communications (ITC) has lately produced a body of literature investigating and measuring the impact of growing use of these communication services on economic growth.

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High service quality has been demanded by users, especially for services of online communication. The use of online communication services has grown tremendously in the past decade as users look for easier and more convenient access to information (Manh Hien, 2014). Highly intense development of information technology and communications (ITC) in the last decade has generated continuous growth in the volume of public services supporting and improving the efficiency of public administration through provision of better and more transparent services for the community.

2. Literature review

During the COVID-19 crisis, online communication using digital technology has played a vital role in promoting health and health education, informing the public on risks associated with maintenance of functional economy and society. Digital technologies enabled governments take quick and efficient political decisions based on data analyses in real time helping public administration authorities provide services to those who need them the most. The Covid – 19 pandemic strengthened the role of online communication both in terms of providing services through online applications, and also in implementing innovative digitalisation solutions, especially for the most vulnerable groups (United Nations e-Government Survey, 2020).

Innovative technological developments, outside the public sector, have changed the expectations of citizens in what regards the capacity of public administration authorities to provide high quality digital services. Still, although the expectations have been high, digital transformation is seen mostly as a cultural change that should occur inside an organisation, and the literature in the field has not provided yet an answer on how this transformative change should be managed (Mergel, Edelmann and Haug, 2019).

A series of scientific papers are to be mentioned with regards to the information discussed above (Carter, L., Bélanger, F., 2005; Lips, M., 2010; Rowley, J., 2011).

3. Research Methodology and results

The present research is based on an in-depth study of the specialized literature. We consider the reports of some prestigious specialized institutions from the perspective of the evolutions regarding the natural environment. The

measurement of the quality of communication services is related to the most critical aspects of these online services. The following are considered but not limited to: focus on the user, user satisfaction, correlation with the results.

Building on Europe's overall digital performance has required tracking the progress of European Union (EU) member countries in terms of digital competitiveness.

Thus, as a result of analyzing over 40 relevant digital performance indicators, we obtain the following outcome. It was shown that the most significant increase in the level of digitization occurs in countries such as Ireland, followed by the Netherlands, Malta and Spain.

4. Measuring the quality of communication services

The quality of services in the public sector has become a high concern, and public institutions try to self-assess themselves and measure the quality of provided services. Public sector organisations comprising internal consumer groups with defined and homogenous tasks and measurable results, similar to private organisations, have the highest potential of successful engaging in provision of online services (Buckley, 2003).

Quality of public services in a country correlates with the level of trust in public administration, easiness of engaging in business activities and society's standard of living. Also, the quality of public services is a good indicator of general well- functioning of a society.

Regarding, online communication services, well-designed communication services could influence the quality and efficiency of provided public services.

There are three aspects involved in the provision of online communication services:
- focus on the user;
- user satisfaction;
- results

The criteria that should be considered in the assessment of any service are the criteria set by the clients. Therefore, an organisation interested in quality should:
- identify the needs and expectations of its clients;
- assess the perception clients on the service of and its elements;
- identify the errors and their causes;
- act to improve quality.

Satisfaction and quality measurement is subjective and based on application of surveys and questionnaires. In this sense, the key aspects that should be taken into account comprise:

- importance given to each factor describing the service, that is why, these should be ranked and given scores, depending on the value of each service for the client;
- assessment of each factor when it is received
- overall service assessment, which involves its analysis without distinguishing its specific elements.

Robin Cooper and Robert S. Kaplan (2005, pp. 130 – 135) identify five determining factors of service quality that are presented below by degree of their importance:

1. Seriousness
2. Capacity to provide the promised service according to expectations and made promises
3. Capacity to inspire trust. Polite attitude of employees and their ability to transmit a feeling of trust and safety
4. Empathy, the effort of giving sincere and personal attention to each client.
5. Tangible elements, external appearance of equipment, personnel and materials providing information.

Service quality is more difficult to be defined, assessed or described quantitatively as they have a few physical features, such as performance, functional features, and maintenance costs that could be used to be compared and measured. Consumer views are the result of comparisons between client expectations and real performance of services (Kotler, 2006, p.601).

The literature in the field reports that there are good practices for online communication. In this context, we note that three concepts affect daily life (Kaya, 2019):

- **Social media** is becoming today the most common method of communication.
- **Big data** (high volume of data) plays a key role in the decision-making process of organisations. The concept of Big Data Big was defined as" big, high speed and variety data requiring innovative processing of information to intensify the understanding of the field and decision-making" (Gartner, 2012).

- **Artificial intelligence** could play a vital role as machines tend to replace the need that decisions be made by humans, and actions be made then accordingly (Kaya, 2019).

5. Analytic instruments of digital societies

Indicators are main analytical tools used to assess a specific activity and compare similar activities of different bodies (The European Commission, 2020).

Digital Economy and Society Index DESI monitors global digital performance of Europe and the progress of EU member states in terms of digital competitiveness by analysing over 40 relevant indicators related to digital performance. The DESI index was developed in accordance with the provisions and recommendations of the OECD's Guide for developing composite indices, its methodology and user guide (The European Commission, 2020).

The most significant growth in the degree of digitalisation could be noted in the Netherlands, Malta and Spain. Finland and Sweden are the leaders in general performance in the digital sector, and over the past five years, they together went above the average together with Belgium and Germany.

The ranking of the EU member states by composite index shows the evolution of digital society and economy for 2020 (The European Commission, 2020):

**Figure 1: Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), 2020**
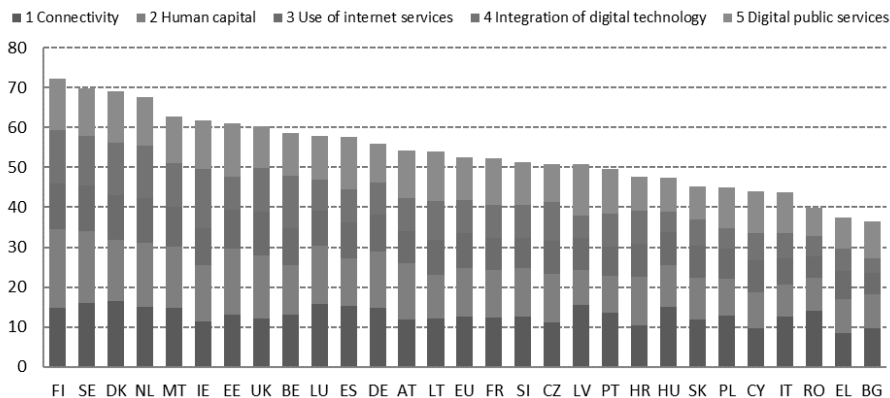
Source: DESI 2020, The European Commission

The chart shows a ranking of the member states by digital economy and society index (DESI), calculated as a weighted average of the five main areas: 1) connectivity (25%), 2) Human capital (25%), 3) Internet use (15%), 4) Digital technology integration (20%) and 5) digital public services (15%) for 2020, based on data of 2019. Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands have the most advanced digital economies in the EU, followed by Malta, Ireland and Estonia. Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Italy have the lowest scores in this index (The European Commission, 2020, p.14).

Concerning digital skills, although 85% of the EU citizens used Internet in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, only 58% have the basic digital skills (Figure 2).

Due to COVID 19 crisis that led to growth in the number of people using Internet, the percentage of people having basic digital skills grew slightly from 55% in 2015 to 58% in 2019. The Netherlands and Finland are the first in this category in the EU, while Bulgaria and Romania are lagging behind. (The European Commission, 2020, p.16).

Figure 2: Digital skills (% of individuals), 2015 – 2019
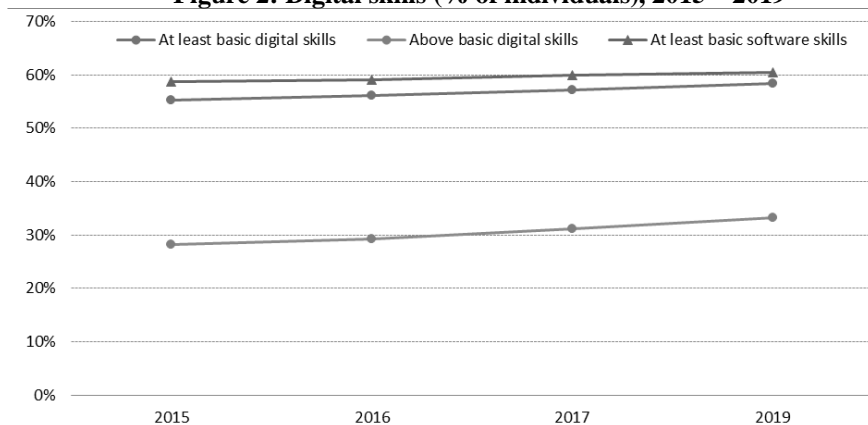
Source: Eurostat, EU survey on the use of ICT by households and per person

The chart clearly shows that basic or advanced digital skills are the two ends of the general indicator of digital skills, it is a composite indicator based on activities performed on the Internet by people aged between 16 and

74 in four main areas (information, communication, problem solving, content creation (The European Commission, 2020).

6. Conclusions

We have seen that literature on online communication is extremely rich. Although online communication public services are of high importance in society, the role of public administration in managing this communication has been perceived unevenly by local or international authors. Online communication in local public administration is a concept referring to use of online communication by public administration institutions, which can transform their relation with citizens, business community and others. Use of digital technology enables authorities deliver services to citizen, interact better with businesses, manage itself in a more efficient way.

The analysis of digitalisation underlines a negative reality in Romania compared to other countries in the European Union, Romania being in its initial stage of reaching some of its goals, except for a few indicators that have been already met. With a low progress of performance in almost all areas, Romania is found at the bottom of the European ranking.

Acronyms:
DESI – Digital Economy and Society Index;
IT – Information Technology;
ICT - Information and Communication Technology;
EU – European Union.

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