

Public Marketing: Case of Self-governing Regions' Brands in Online Environment

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Abstract: Online environment, including brands of public institutions, is becoming a significant part of public administration. Nowadays, with a social media communication widespread, the public marketing managers representing self-governing regions are forced to work on their image and monitor and influence region's brand behavior in the online environment. Therefore, an article aims on the current state of art in the field of public brand marketing and the nature of mentions of users (citizens) about this brand. The study employed data obtained with use of Brand24.com application which automatically collect the data on region's brands behavior in the online environment. The analysis is oriented on following aspects: (1) brand's mentions in online environment, (2) number of social media views and interactions raised over the brand, and (3) the level of positive and negative sentiment related to the brand. The research sample included 13 out of 14 regions existing in the Czech Republic, for research reasons the capitol city of Prague was excluded from the sample. The findings showed that high regional differences in brand awareness, brand's social media reach as well as brand's associated text sentiment exist. Besides of this, several implications for public marketing managers are presented in the study.

Keywords: self-governing region; brand; online environment; social media; public administration; Czech Republic

JEL Classification: H30; M30

1. Introduction

Increased citizen's participation in online environment together with the information and communication technologies (ICT) developments have created new challenges for public marketing. Fung (2015) asserts that citizen participation mainly supports "three aspects of governance: effectiveness, legitimacy, and social justice". The emergence of omnipresent use of online communication, particularly Web 2.0 and 3.0 and social media communication meant that public institutions, including government and local governments, and their brands need to be more visible to citizens in virtual space.

2. State of the Art in Brand Marketing Research

In the past decade, the "branding had become an open source activity, via which anyone and everyone had a say in matters of the brand" (Fournier and Avery 2011). Remarkably, it means that brands started to live with their own life, sometimes working against the creators. Fournier and Avery (2011) commented it in this way: "When marketers created stylized content that could be spread virally, they were horrified to see these same sharing capabilities used against them. Consumers hijacked brand messages and turned them into parodies". The brand oriented research mainly focus on business administration issues as consumer vs brand generated platforms (van Noort and Willemsen 2012), brand consciousness on consumption behavior in terms of consumption motivations, purchase intention, and brand loyalty oriented on Generation Y and luxury fashion industry (Giovannini, Xu, and Thomas 2015), or influence of parasocial (robotic) interactions in online social media (Yuksel and Labrecque 2016). There are also many studies related to health-related environment as branding of cigarettes its impact on smokers (Huang, Kornfield, and Emery 2016; Kim, Hopper, and Simpson 2015; Ulucanlar, Fooks, and Hatchard 2014; Farsalinos et al. 2013), use of psychotics (Corazza, Valeriani, and Bersani 2014), or food and drink consumption (Freeman et al. 2016; Holmberg et al.

2016). In the field of public sector, and particularly public institutions, there are exist only a bit out-to-date, studies related to the brand and community (Kane et al. 2009) or place branding (Anholt 2008).

Moreover, the brands are usually presented in different context, which is in the form of online comments available on websites or social media. For this reason, the sentiment of the text associated with the brand should be determined. These texts are presented as unstructured information source which is difficult to analyze and requiring time-consuming and expert focused approach (González-Rodríguez, Martínez-Torres, and Toral 2016). To avoid this approach, we applied a sentiment analysis tool incorporated in the software application presented later in this text.

As it was showed earlier in the text, there is unfortunately not enough up-to-date research done in the field of brand “behavior” in context of public institutions and the public sector, in general. Therefore, this study aims on identification of brand awareness of the region’s brand among users (and thus likely citizens) who communicate online with the region, and at the same time, on the engagement of citizens in this brand and the sentiment of communication about the brand.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methods and Metrics

The study is based on the analysis of online environment to identify brand’s presence. This kind of analysis conducted in online environment is a part of so-called Internet mediated research (Hewson 2007). For the purpose of this study a new set of metrics to measure brand presence in the online environment as well as brand’s engagement by citizens and the sentiment of relevant communication was designed by the author. These metrics are mainly based on the definitions of terms outlined by social networks as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Table 1. Metrics of brand’s word-of mouth, interactions, and sentiment.

Specific Metrics	Description of the metrics
Mentions	All available presences of the region’s brand in online environment. The brand can be mentioned as the passive presence (with not interactive linking on the brand’s profile) or in active presence (with an interactive link).
Social Media Mentions	Mentioning a brand (or person/page) on social media is the electronic way of tagging someone on the social media networks, and by mentioning the brand it links to that brand’s social media profile. Usually, it uses active mentioning of the brand.
Non social media mentions	Mentioning a brand in traditional online environment, mainly websites. Usually, it uses passive mentioning of the brand.
Social media reach	The total number of people who has seen the specific brand during a specific period (last 30 days in this study) in the online environment.
Interactions	The metrics involves how the brand’s institution talking to individuals on social media (Twitter and blogs interactions are considered in this study). This interaction can be both reactive (to people who have messaged your brand) and proactive (to people you reach out based on one or more factors).
Shares	Reflects how many times the text associated with the specific brand was shared on social media
Likes	Reflects how many likes the text associated with the specific brand received on social media
Sentiment	This metric reflects either positive or negative sentiment of the text associated with the specific brand. Texts with neutral sentiment are neglected.

3.2. Collection of the Data Set and a Software Used for Data Gathering

The data of analyzed facets were gathered during a thirty-day period from January 12, 2020 to February 11, 2020. Data were collected with use of Brand24.com application tool and after the collection processed in MS Excel for the purpose of regional comparison. Brand24.com application was used in the past with many organizations as well as start-ups. For better picture, how an organization

can use this application, Krzysiek Radoszewski, the Marketing Lead for Central and Eastern Europe at Uber, says on this: “At Uber, we use social listening on a daily basis, which allows us to understand how our users feel about the changes we are implementing. As soon as we introduce a modification, we know which parts of it are greeted with enthusiasm, and which need more work” (Brand24.com 2020). Similarly, the success or failure of a specific regional policies, or regional administration quality can be measured with used application.

3.3. Research Sample

Research study focuses on analysis of online communication of self-governing regions. The Czech Republic regions are established according to the Act no. 129/2000 on Higher-level territorial self-governing units (Czech Republic 2018). The thirteen regions and one capital city with regional status exist. The capital Prague was excluded from the sample due to several facts: much higher tourist attention, almost doubled GDP per capita (39,902 EUR), as well as significantly higher population (1,272,690 inhabitants) than majority of regions. In the sample, there are three regions exceeding with population exceeding one million citizens; at the other end, there are two regions with population lower than a half million of inhabitants: Liberec region with population of 441 thousands, and Karlovy Vary region with population of 296 thousands.

The detailed characteristics of the regions researched are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. List of regions included in the sample. (Czech Statistical Office, 2018)

Region's official name	Population ¹	Area (km ²)	GDP per capita (EUR)
Středočeský kraj	1,345,764	11,014.97	16,930
Jihočeský kraj	639,180	10,056.79	14,698
Kraj Vysočina	508,664	6,795.56	14,893
Plzeňský kraj	579,228	7,560.93	16,737
Karlovarský kraj	296,106	3,314.46	11, 992
Ústecký kraj	820,937	5,334.52	13,112
Liberecký kraj	440,934	3,162.93	13,853
Královéhradecký kraj	550,848	4,758.54	16,791
Pardubický kraj	517,243	4,519	14,738
Olomoucký kraj	633,133	5,266.57	14,196
Moravskoslezský kraj	1,207,419	5,426.83	14,922
Jihomoravský kraj	1,180,477	7,194.56	17,098
Zlínský kraj	583,039	3,963.55	15,498

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Brand's Mentions in the Online Environment

Brand's mentions were represented by all available *mentions* about the brand in the online environment. The total number of mentions recorded for all sampled regions was 2,654. The number of mentions in the individual regions ranged from 331 mentions about Středočeský (Central Bohemian) region to 101 mentions about Liberec region. The *non social mentions* were represented by higher percentage out of the all mentions, the highest number of these mentions was recorded in Olomouc region (294); the lowest was recorded in Liberec region. The highest number of *social media mentions* was found in Středočeský (70), Ústecký (65) and Zlínský (52) region. On the other side, the lowest number of these mentions was found in Vysočina (10) and Olomouc (14) region.

More detailed data about number of mentions in individual regions are available in Table 3.

Table 3. Brand's mentions according to official name of regions.

Region's official name	Mentions		Social Media Mentions	Non Social Media Mentions
	Abs.	Rel.		
Středočeský kraj	331	12.47	70	261
Ústecký kraj	312	11.76	65	247
Olomoucký kraj	308	11.61	14	294
Jihomoravský kraj	299	11.27	43	256
Moravskoslezský kraj	267	10.06	25	242
Zlínský kraj	243	9.16	52	191
Karlovarský kraj	227	8.55	46	181
Pardubický kraj	227	8.55	31	196
Jihočeský kraj	197	7.42	24	173
Plzeňský kraj	172	6.48	20	152
Královéhradecký kraj	171	6.44	19	152
Kraj Vysočina	130	4.90	10	120
Liberecký kraj	101	3.80	19	82
In total	2,654	100.0	368	2,286

4.2. Social Media Reach and Interactions

Overall number of social media reach in all sampled regions was 616,369 views. On the contrary to the previous results in individual regions, the social media reach can importantly differ from overall number of mentions. The highest social media reach was recorded in Liberec and Zlín regions with more than 150 thousand of users who have viewed the region's brand. On the other side, there are five regions where the social media reach is lower than 10 thousand of views: South Bohemian (Jihočeský), Plzeň, Pardubice, Olomouc and Vysočina.

The highest number of interactions was found in case of Liberec (472) and Ústí nad Labem (340) region. On the other hand, very low number of interactions existed in case Hradec Králové (Královéhradecký) (44), Plzeň (37), Vysočina (31) and Olomouc (17) region. Much higher percentage of interactions is made by likes (91.1 %) in comparison to shares (9.9 %).

More detailed data about social media reach and interaction are available in Table 4.

Table 4. Word of mouth about brands of regions.

Region's official name	Social media reach	Interactions	Shares	Likes
Liberecký kraj	157,000	472	36	435
Zlínský kraj	156,000	240	25	213
Ústecký kraj	105,000	340	36	285
Jihomoravský kraj	87,280	128	19	107
Moravskoslezský kraj	38,267	97	3	91
Karlovarský kraj	30,114	383	57	324
Královéhradecký kraj	18,036	44	0	44
Středočeský kraj	12,900	495	42	453
Jihočeský kraj	9,794	57	5	47
Plzeňský kraj	7,038	37	1	32
Pardubický kraj	3,420	150	7	116
Olomoucký kraj	2,213	17	0	17
Kraj Vysočina	2,207	31	2	29

In total	616,369	1,996	191	1,740
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4.3. Sentiment of Brand

The overall sentiment of all brands in sampled regions was slightly positive and reached ratio of 1.11, where the positive vs negative sentiment is measured. Significantly higher sentiment ratio for the brand was found in Plzeň (5.83) and Hradec Králové (Královéhradecký) (4.33) region. Negative sentiment of region's brand was recorded in five following regions: South Moravian (Jihomoravský) (0.83), Pardubice (0.65), Olomouc (0.62), Zlín (0.55), and Liberec (0.38) region.

More detailed data about social media reach and interaction are available in Table 5.

Table 5. Word of mouth about brands of regions.

Region's official name	Positive sentiment		Negative sentiment		Sentiment Ratio (positive vs. negative)
	Abs.	Rel.	Abs.	Rel.	
Plzeňský kraj	35	12.28	6	2.34	5.83
Královéhradecký kraj	26	9.12	6	2.34	4.33
Moravskoslezský kraj	23	8.07	9	3.52	2.56
Karlovarský kraj	23	8.07	11	4.30	2.09
Jihočeský kraj	14	4.91	9	3.52	1.56
Ústecký kraj	46	16.14	32	12.50	1.44
Středočeský kraj	14	4.91	12	4.69	1.17
Kraj Vysočina	10	3.51	9	3.52	1.11
Jihomoravský kraj	20	7.02	24	9.38	0.83
Pardubický kraj	26	9.12	40	15.63	0.65
Olomoucký kraj	39	13.68	63	24.61	0.62
Zlínský kraj	17	5.96	31	12.11	0.55
Liberecký kraj	6	2.11	16	6.25	0.38
In total	285	100.0	256	100.0	1.11

5. Discussion

The findings showed some interesting insights in the understanding of brand awareness and brand sentiment in individual regions of the Czech Republic.

(1) At first, the results showed that media mentions are still more present in the environment of traditional online tools as websites of the region itself, websites inter-connected with the region, local daily and weekly news, or communication of the police stations and social media do not play a significant role in the overall mentions about the brand, yet. (2) At second, the significant differences in approach to online marketing exist in individual regions. For example, the Liberec region, which recorded the lowest number of overall online mentions at the same time received the highest social media reach. Which can mean that the marketing or public relations managers focus rather on social media activities than website oriented online communication. (3) At third, there were also found high differences in sentiment associated with the region's brand. While there are two regions with highly positive sentiment and two other with moderate positive, there are also five regions with negative sentiment. In this case, the Liberec region is interesting example, because despite of very high social media reach, the region received the most negative sentiment of the brand. Such negative connotations can be considered as a danger for current political representation of the region.

From the general perspective, an inspiration of business sector practice in the field of online reputation management, can be useful. In this comparison, the regional office governing the entire region would correspond to a large-scale business entity with high number of employees and huge

number of customers. The research of Kantorová and Bachmann (2018) showed that such large business companies pay high attention to “strategic approach to online community management and also making their own online communities”. Regional authorities should therefore integrate such approach, at least to a limited extent, into their management practice.

6. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

This study has brought a new knowledge in the field of region’s brand awareness of the region’s citizens who communicate online with the region. Also, it examined engagement of citizens by this brand and the sentiment of communication which is associated with the brand.

Moreover, the study findings reveal several implications to public marketing managers of the regions. Nowadays, the managers should be familiar with the necessity to regularly monitor the brand’s awareness, reach, and sentiment because it can be done easily and with high exactness with the use of relevant software. Also, they should deal with the content analysis of citizen’s comments generating highly positive or highly negative sentiment of the brand mentions in online environment. At the same time, they should be prepared to influence and modify such positive or negative content by providing a proper and in-time online communication.

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