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Theatre Marketing: Using Websites to Attract Young Target Audience

Dr Mirna Leko Šimić and Dr Antun Biloš

Abstract

Classic theatres worldwide are faced with the trend of aging of loyal audiences and general decrease of the audience size. It indicates that attracting young audiences to classic theatre is the key issue of its existence. Since the quality of communication is one of the major elements of marketing efficiency, the aim of this research is to identify Croatian classic theatre website characteristics and usability elements which are connected with website experience of young target audiences. Altogether 7 Croatian national theatres and three commercial theatres' official websites were tested. The in-depth analysis of websites of sample theatres implies that website content had the most positive perception among respondents. Two other measured constructs – visual attractiveness and visibility of theatre websites have also scored both positive. Finally, the overall perception of sample theatre websites was graded somewhat positive. In terms of strategic implications, this research indicates the underutilized websites potential as an efficient communication tool toward young audiences. They are currently created with the aim to satisfy the need for information, but the expectations of young audiences are higher. Two-way web communication, which makes existing and potential consumers an integral part of theatre product in its widest sense should be implemented.

Key Words: Theatre marketing, Marketing Communication, Website evaluation, Croatia, Young audience

Introduction

Many public cultural institutions including classic theatres are faced with similar problems worldwide. These problems can be identified as supply and demand side issues. Supply side issues include increasing competition and decreasing public financing. Demand side issues are related to the trend of aging of loyal audiences and general decrease of the audience size.

Increasing competition creates both audience and financial resources attraction difficulties. The number of all kinds of cultural institutions in both private and public sector is increasing. For example, number of professional theatres in Croatia has increased from 14 in 1984 to 32 in 2015 (SLJH, 2015). At the same time, decreasing public funding forces public cultural institutions to either cut their costs (usually program costs) or find additional external financing (from ticket sales, donations or sponsorships).

Aging of loyal audiences and general decrease of audience size is due to several reasons:

- As the supply of different cultural products rises, less people are willing to stay loyal to only one type of cultural product (i.e. theatre). Especially young audiences tend to mix „high“ and „popular“ cultural products, often preferring popular ones (Kolb, 2005).

- The lower standard of living in the last decade has made culture products' consumption too expensive for certain audiences. Eurobarometer research (2013) in Croatia has indicated that 20% of respondents can't afford a theatre visit.
- Last but not least, contemporary lifestyle of many people leaves less free time for cultural products' consumption as well as less readiness to plan the free time far ahead. In case of theatres, it means that theatre visit is not planned in a year time span as the subscriptions require, and the number of loyal audiences (subscribers) is significantly decreasing.

Taking into account these circumstances, it becomes clear that attracting young audiences to classic theatre is the key issue of its existence. However, due to cultural products' supply characteristics, it becomes increasingly challenging. Our previous research (Leko Šimić, Mikrut and Štimac, 2014) has indicated that 49% of young respondents in the sample of 876 people aged 18 to 35 have never visited a classic theatre, 45% visit it few times a year and 5% visit it at least 6 times a year. Only 1% of the sample are loyal theatre visitors, i.e. subscribers. Another result of the same research indicated that the key issue of attracting young audiences to classic theatre is „communication to and about the theatre“.

Theatre marketers have to be aware of contemporary lifestyle of young people which is strongly connected to internet and e-communication (Wuest, 2015; Leko Šimić, Mikrut and Štimac, 2014; Turrini, Soscia and Maulini, 2014; Kolb, 2005). Different activities that include internet are an evitable part of everyday activities of young people. Therefore, we propose theatre websites as a potential for efficient communication to existing and potential young audiences. With the aim of identifying key websites features for efficient communication to young audiences, seven national and three commercial theatre websites were tested. The goal was to measure the opinions and preferences of young target audience towards specific theatre website elements, namely: visual attractiveness, content, usability and overall perception. There is a rather limited scope of available related research and therefore it might be useful to explore this area from the website visitors' perspective.

Theatre Marketing Communication

Analysing theatre visitors' satisfaction Boermer, Moser and Jobst (2011) have found that the satisfaction is a result of several determinants, one of them being service quality. Service quality in cultural institutions comprises main service (topic of performance, stage direction, ensemble, principal performer, stage design and music) and additional service (infrastructure and service delivered by the theatre). The latter one, to our opinion, also comprises the quality of communication to and with existing and potential customers.

Marketing communication in general involves numerous types of activities. According to Finn, Mc Fayden and Hoskins (1994), cultural institutions are specific in sense that all types of publicity, including negative, play a far more important role in promotion than other activities, even advertising. Although this seems true even after two decades, the technology development today is forcing cultural institutions to use more sophisticated promotion tools in reaching existing and potential audiences. Some research (O'Sullivan, 2007; Pinho and Macedo, 2006) show that the internet has been increasingly used in communication and promotion by performing arts institutions. One of the rare studies on media and theatre in Croatia (Vidačković and Bukvić, 2014) has indicated that 53% of respondents often and 32%

sometimes visit theatre website, in order to get information that will help them decide about visiting theatre.

Internet has potential for highly effective communication of cultural institutions, especially theatres, since it can improve organizational responsiveness to different stakeholders (Saxton et al. 2007); it can help to cope with the increasing competition (Ryan, 1999); it can help to better perform in fundraising or volunteers market (Sargeant et al. 2007); and it can help to increase image and reputation of cultural institution (Fillis, 2003).

As it was shown in the introductory part of this paper, all these elements have been identified as important factors for improvement of theatre marketing performance.

A review of contemporary research of theatre marketing communication indicates that there are four phases in its development:

- Classic, pre-internet communication,
- One-way internet communication (websites and e-mail),
- Transactional strategies/communication, and
- Two-way communication (webcasts, virtual visits, blogging, etc.).

Classic communication of public theatres in Croatia is usually based on publicity and public relations, since these are the least costly communication activities. Additionally, the on-site posters and brochures that can be bought are used to inform about new performances. Advertising is used rarely and is mainly using local newspapers, radio and TV. For example, Croatian National Theatre in Osijek, that was included in this research has started publishing theatre newsletter as a bimonthly supplement of the major local / regional newspaper. These activities can fulfil its information role, but are not very efficient in persuading and educating existing and potential audiences, which are the basis of influencing behaviour related to cultural consumption (Scheff Bernstein, 2007). Classic communication today doesn't reach young audiences efficiently due to their preferences for virtual information search.

One-way internet communication has become a must in Croatian public theatres and most of them have some kind of virtual presentation. The content of their websites usually consists of program information as the most important part, price list, schedule for performances and news. E-mail is used for communication with loyal customers (subscribers), giving information and reminding about their scheduled performances, visiting performances and similar. These activities help increasing the image and reputation as well as the visibility of cultural institution. However, the existing databases of visitors are used neither as a potential for market research, nor to develop quality relationship with existing customers.

Transactional communication strategies enable booking and buying tickets, but are relatively rare in Croatian public theatres. However, the majority of commercial theatres are using this possibility. The necessity to buy tickets on-site was one of the major identified in previous research on Croatian National Theatre in Osijek (Leko Šimić, Mikrut and Štimac, 2014). Moreover, this type of strategy allows other important activities, like e-fundraising or online gift shops presentations and sales, thus enabling cultural institutions to boost revenues and broaden and retain their online customer base (Turrini, Soscia and Maulini 2014).

Two-way communication strategies are the result of development of websites functionality. Theatres use them to involve audiences more heavily into their activities and thereby strengthen the relationship with them (Ravanas, 2007). Webcasts, virtual visits, and blogging about new products are the most widely used tools which make audiences an active part of the theatre and enable a complete experience of the theatre visit by providing information, persuasion and education of the audiences. Usage of social media for marketing communication is one of the most recent developments in two-way communication of cultural institutions. Hausmann and Poellmann (2013) found that German theatres are efficiently fighting the same above mentioned demand-side problems by using social media (collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networks and virtual worlds) for purposes of communication and promotion and word of mouth, but also for market research, innovation management and reputation management. In Croatian theatres however, social media are significantly less relevant from visitors' perspective, according to Vidačković and Bukvić (2014).

Websites as marketing communication tools in Croatian theatres

The majority of Croatian theatres use websites as tactical marketing tool in order to improve subscriptions, inform audiences about the program and keep the same level of traditional advertising costs. However, as it is emphasized by Hausmann and Poellmann (2013) the websites can be used for much wider strategic marketing purposes. For example, Conway and Whitelock (2007) have found that British theatres that use relationship marketing approach when using websites, where participants perform activities based on their common interest are the most successful ones in terms of their market performance.

Theatres have to think about website functionality in terms of (Pavičić, Alfirević and Aleksić, 2006):

- Creation, editing and maintenance of the website
- Analysis of advantages and disadvantages of banners and pop-up windows
- Usage of e-mail for direct communication with identified audiences
- Analysis of advantages and disadvantages of forums and discussion groups on their websites.

As these activities often require full commitment as well as some expertize knowledge, public theatres in Croatia often miss a person to take on this task. Online community managers are not recognized by theatre owners as important.

Until today a standard framework or systematic benchmark which defines official website efficiency has not been established (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2008). Most research on this topic is facing a limited number of quality factors or is aimed at a specific web service. Although there should be a significant number of factors connected with website success, there is a fairly small number of research papers that analyse the combination of all factors and services. In the last two decades, research and studies have generated different approaches and models for the assessment of website quality and efficiency, ranging from various research goals, different target group perspectives and website types, to name only a few. Content, usability and aesthetics are core constructs in users' perception and evaluation of websites (Thielsch, Blotenberg and Jaron, 2013). However, website users' evaluation of satisfaction and overall success is dependent upon the context of the analysed website, determinants

of satisfaction and intention to visit/revisit are goal specific (Schaupp, 2010). Having in mind the special characteristics of cultural institutions in general and their market oriented efforts, a rather limited number of available papers about different approaches to digital presence evaluation has been published. Padilla-Meléndez and Del Águila-Obra (2013) suggested a theoretical framework for understanding the online strategies of museums' use of Web and social media, their sources of online value and several measurements of online popularity and visibility. Several papers stressed the importance of social media and social networks for cultural institutions' communication (Ciceo and Ionescu, 2014; Pett, 2012). It is abundantly clear that website evaluation or even digital marketing activities evaluation can be approached from a number of different viewpoints.

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this research is to identify website characteristics and usability elements which are connected with website experience of young target audiences. The research purpose is guided by the assumption that website experience will influence the way the information is perceived. Turrini, Soscia and Maulini (2012) suggest that internet is the favourite direct marketing tool for informing or retaining target groups of different types of performing arts events (i.e. opera, ballet and classical concert). It is also noted by the same authors that internet may combat the aging of theatre audience by giving priority to those that are more familiar with the new technologies (i.e. young target audience). In other words, using only the traditional media is not an adequate communication approach if a cultural organization wants to stay relevant, interesting and connected to its target audience (Ciceo and Ionescu, 2014).

The main motive behind the research purpose is the fact that young target audiences are not informed about the theatre offer and tend not to consume theatre services based on the authors' previous research (Leko Šimić, Mikrut and Štimac, 2014). Furthermore, younger audiences prefer digital communication channels which make theatre website an important communication channel, as it was documented in literature review.

The research goals are formed in order to perceive and understand the opinions and preferences of young target audience towards specific theatre website elements.

Main research goals are described as follows:

- To explore young target audience opinions and preferences towards visual components of theatre websites
- To explore young target audience opinions and preferences towards content of theatre websites
- To explore young target audience opinions and preferences towards the usability of theatre websites
- To explore young target audience trust in provided content of theatre websites
- To explore young target audience opinions and preferences towards revisit and recommendation intentions regarding theatre websites

- To explore young target audience opinions about theatre websites weaknesses and flaws.

Sample

The broad area of the research consists of Croatian theatre domain in general. Using the data from the Ministry of culture theatre index (Republic of Croatia Ministry of Culture, 2015), a total of 167 subjects were identified including public and private theatres, theatre groups and theatre houses which conduct activities as an independent legal entity or special organizational units within other legal entities. Among 167 subjects, the index contained the official website information for 50 theatres (assuming other theatres don't have an official website). However, further analysis of the index showed inconsistent and missing data and required additional verification (namely, several specified websites were unavailable). Google search engine was used to test website existence using the full name of every given theatre from the index as the keyword in order to determine the up-to-date list of available theatre websites. Google is the most popular search engine in Croatia (Alexa, 2016) and that is the main reason behind its usage in website verification process. Finally, a list of 95 theatres with available official websites was created.

Currently, there are 7 theatres in Croatia which have the status of Croatian National Theatre including Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Split, Rijeka (called Ivan Zajc), Varaždin, Zadar, Šibenik and Osijek. Websites of 7 Croatian National Theatres were primarily analysed. Furthermore, based on an in-depth interview with the marketing director of Croatian National Theatre in Osijek, 3 commercial theatres were identified as a benchmark for theatre activities on a national level. Therefore, the list was expanded with 3 additional commercial theatre websites, adding a total of 10 theatre websites for the analysis:

- Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb (www.hnk.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre in Split (www.hnk-split.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre Ivan Zajc (www.hnk-zajc.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre in Šibenik (www.hnksi.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre in Zadar (www.hnk-zadar.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin (www.hnkvz.hr)
- Croatian National Theatre in Osijek (www.hnk-osijek.hr)
- Gavella (www.gavella.hr)
- Teatar Exit (www.teatarexit.hr)
- ZeKaEm (www.zekaem.hr).

Website evaluation within this paper focuses on the user perspective. The user perspective aims to determine the user perception (visual attractiveness, usability, content, revisit/recommendation intention and overall perception) on given theatre websites based on the same set of elements.

One of the main goals of this paper is to determine the current perception of theatre website features from the user perspective, or more specifically – computer savvy young audiences, 18-35 years of age, based on previous research (Leko Šimić, Mikrut and Štimac, 2014).

Given the available research resources, purposive user sample approach was used. The intentional user sample was created among age appropriate students.

Student samples are clearly biased and limit the scope of possible conclusions but were chosen for several additional reasons besides availability:

- Students are rather homogenous group with respect to motivation to consume classic cultural products (they are in process of obtaining higher education degree and becoming “academic citizens” with theatre consumption as a common part of their lifestyle, their family status, since most of them are not subject to family and especially small children obligations, and their free time availability, which is above average)
- The study focuses on young target group (18-35)
- Target group needs to be computer savvy
- Website testing should be done in controlled environment and with prior instructions.

Finally, a total of 54 students of J.J. Strossmayer University in Osijek created a target group sample. Male students comprised 42,6% of the sample and female students 57,4%. Age distribution of the sample was as follows: 18-20 - 7,4%, 21-25 - 75,9%, 26-30 - 9,3% and 31 and more 7,4%. Every testing participant has either successfully completed a university level e-marketing class or was actively enrolled in one, meaning the participants had prior website testing experience.

Data collection

Website testing was conducted at 3 occasions during December 2015 and January 2016 at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek. Website testing was held in computer labs with almost identical computer configuration under researcher guidance and supervision in order to provide the controlled environment, i.e. same user-side capabilities for every tested website. At the beginning of every testing session, the researchers covered the brief instructions for website evaluation as an additional reminder to prior website evaluation knowledge. Every testing participant (tester) had to interact with the website (explore) for at least 1 minute (i.e. minimum interaction time) and was not given any predefined tasks to accomplish. Participants could choose their preferred browser for website interaction (browsers were recently updated and tested). After the website interaction, each tester was pointed to a brief online questionnaire covering the main aspects of the interaction, namely: content, visual identity, usability, revisit/recommendation intention.

The research instrument was designed by the authors and based on a number of research papers (Schaupp, 2010; Hasan and Abuelrub 2008; Mvungi, De Jager and Underwood, 2008; Tolentino, 2008; Castañeda, Muñoz-Leiva and Luque, 2007; Suh, 2003), tested in a previous research (Biloš, 2012) and further revised.

The questionnaire was created and data gathered using SurveyGizmo software. There were a total of 17 questions (16 using 7 point Likert scale with additional not applicable option (N/A) and 1 open ended question) and additional questions regarding the demographics. In total, there were 533 tests conducted. 521 tests were valid and analysed while 12 were disqualified (due to partial responses and otherwise unusable data).

Website testing was conducted using 17 variables grouped as follows:

- Visual attractiveness
- Homepage visual attractiveness
- Inside-page visual attractiveness
- Visual alignment with website topic
- Content
- Website timeliness
- Easy to understand information
- Website trust
- Content quality
- Usability
- Website purpose based on homepage
- Easy to find information
- Information finding expectancy
- Site speed
- Obstruction elements
- Overall perception
- Revisit intention
- Recommendation intention
- Expectation
- Overall impression

Research results and discussion

Visual attractiveness was tested using 3 unweighted variables: homepage attractiveness, inside-page attractiveness and visual alignment to the website topic. Data shows acceptable construct reliability (Crombach's alpha is 0,908, mean inter-item correlation is 0,765 and item-total correlations are 0,730 and higher). Website content was tested with 4 unweighted variables: website timeliness, ability to easily understand information, website trust (confidence in provided content) and perceived content quality. Data shows acceptable construct reliability (Crombach's alpha is 0,853, mean inter-item correlation is 0,595 and item-total correlations are 0,636 and higher). Website usability contained tests with 5 unweighted variables: ability to determine website purpose based on homepage, ability to easily find information, information finding expectation, website speed and the presence of obstruction (attention grabbing) elements. Data shows acceptable construct reliability (Crombach's alpha is 0,8, mean inter-item correlation is 0,443 and item-total correlations are 0,499 and higher). Overall user perception was tested using 4 unweighted variables: revisit intention, recommendation intention, user expectation and overall impression. Data shows acceptable construct reliability (Crombach's alpha is 0,925, mean inter-item correlation is 0,758 and item-total correlations are 0,806 and higher). Finally, a composite construct Website score was created using 4 abovementioned constructs: visual attractiveness, content, usability and overall perception. Data shows acceptable composite construct reliability (Crombach's alpha is 0,893, mean inter-item correlation is 0,707 and item-total correlations are 0,763 and higher). Recorded mean scores, standard deviation and variance per variable and per construct can be observed on the following table (Table I).

Table I. Average theatre website scores

Element/variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Homepage visual attractiveness	521	5,01	1,68	2,82
Inside-page visual attractiveness	521	4,83	1,63	2,65
Visual alignment with website topic	521	5,42	1,43	2,05
Visual attractiveness	521	5,09	1,46	2,12
Website timelines	498	5,78	1,18	1,40
Easy to understand information	520	5,75	1,14	1,30
Website trust	521	6,03	1,07	1,15
Content quality	516	5,47	1,29	1,66
Content	521	5,75	0,98	0,95
Website purpose based on homepage	521	5,62	1,39	1,92
Easy to find information	521	5,46	1,41	2,00
Information finding expectancy	518	4,83	1,52	2,31
Site speed	521	5,56	1,42	2,01
Obstruction elements	519	5,77	1,30	1,70

Usability	521	5,45	1,05	1,11
Revisit intention	501	4,36	1,78	3,15
Recommendation intention	500	4,34	1,81	3,26
Expectation	516	4,51	1,61	2,60
Overall impression	521	5,01	1,54	2,38
Overall Perception	521	4,56	1,52	2,31
Website score	521	5,21	1,11	1,23

Source: authors' research

Average score of visual attractiveness construct is 5,09 ($s=1,45$) which indicates that testers generally had a positive opinion about the website visual aspects and found websites visually appealing to some extent. However, it's interesting to notice that homepage attractiveness mean score was slightly higher than inside page score ($\bar{x}=5,01$ and $\bar{x}=4,83$ respectively). Tested theatre websites are generally perceived as visually aligned with website topic ($\bar{x}=5,42$).

Average content score construct is 5,75 ($s=0,98$) which is the best combined average score among tested elements. This score indicates a positive perception of tested website content. The biggest positive contribution to the content average score is gained from website trust ($\bar{x}=6,03$) which is the only variable with a mean score of 6 and higher. Theatre websites clearly instil confidence with their content. However, it should be noted that theatre websites visitors have predominantly positive attitude toward trust as a website quality component.

Usability element construct recorded an average score of 5,45 ($s=1,05$) which again indicates a general positive view from the testers perspective, at least to some extent. Information finding expectancy recorded the lowest grade ($\bar{x}=4,83$) while the other four variables (website purpose based on homepage, easy to find information, site speed and obstruction elements) recorded scores of 5,45 and higher.

The overall perception construct was graded at 4,56 ($s=1,52$) indicating a somewhat positive general attitude toward the tested theatre websites. However, it is important to note that 2 variables within this group, revisit intention and recommendation intention resulted in lowest average score compared to every other variable ($\bar{x}=4,36$ and $\bar{x}=4,43$ respectively). In addition, website impression recorded a mean score of 5,01.

In summary, based on Website score as a composite construct, tested websites recorded a mean score of 5,21. It can be concluded that based on 521 tests of 10 theatre websites, average score is not impressively high, although it is perceived as a generally positive (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Website quality evaluation

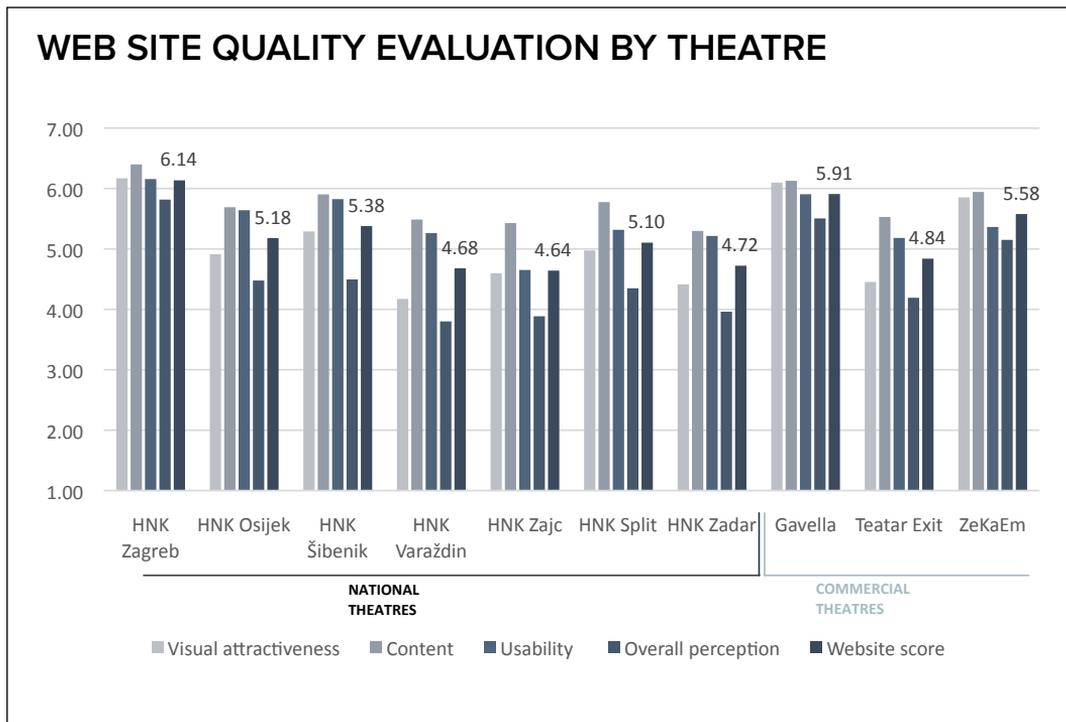


Source: authors' research

The recorded scores present the overall perception of tested 10 theatre websites. These are averaged scores and the derived conclusions are quite limited. In order to understand the observed differences among the 10 theatre websites, it is important to analyse the scores grouped by the specific theatre. Grouped analysis show differences between the theatres based on testers perception and indicate several implications.

Based on all the variables in their predetermined groups, final score of website analysis is as follows: HNK Zagreb (6,14), Gavella (5,91), ZeKaEm (5,58), HNK Šibenik (5,38), HNK Osijek (5,18), HNK Split (5,10), Teatar Exit (4,84), HNK Zadar (4,72), HNK Varaždin (4,68) and finally HNK Zajc (4,64). HNK Zagreb is the best performed theatre website and the only one with a combined mean score of 6 and higher. Two commercial theatres, Gavella and ZeKaEm follow on 2nd and 3rd place, while additional 3 theatre websites (HNK Šibenik, HNK Osijek and HNK Split) recorded a combined mean score of at least 5. All the others recorded a combined mean score of less than 5 which could be a serious indication of improvement potential. The lowest performing theatre website was HNK Zajc with combined mean score of 4,64. Final scores can be observed on the following figure (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Website quality evaluation by theatre

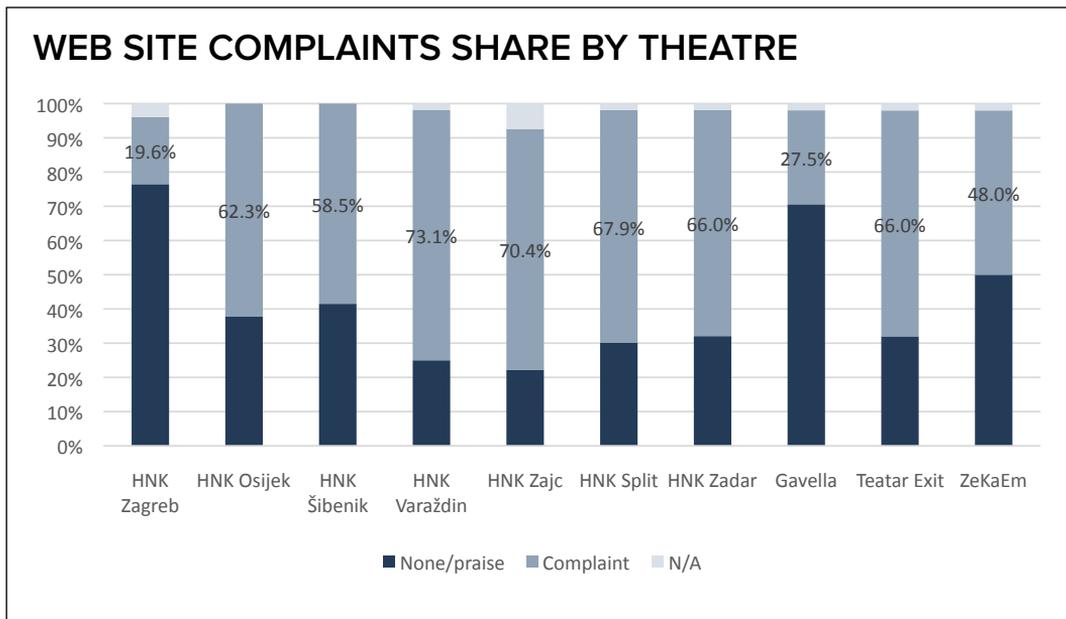


Source: authors' research

Additional segmentation approach was the distribution on national and commercial theatre websites. Although T-test suggests significant statistical difference between national and commercial theatre website quality indicating commercial theatre websites as better performing ($\bar{x}=5,44$ and $\bar{x}=5,12$; $p<0,1$, $t=-3,075$, $df=519$), it should be emphasized that the 3 commercial theatres were chosen as a benchmark. Therefore, we expect that the larger sample of commercial theatres would significantly decrease the website score difference which might be one of the possible guidelines for further research.

Clearly, in order to understand which website elements need the most improvement, a detailed analysis is needed. In addition to abovementioned elements and corresponding variables, testers expressed their view on website weaknesses in an open-ended question. All the collected comments per website were divided into 3 broad categories in relation to their content: a) none/praise (several testers expressed no complaints toward tested website or even suggested several positive comments), b) complaints (any kind of negative comment or suggestion for improvement) c) unusable comments (useless and/or inappropriate comments) marked N/A. The smallest number of complaints/suggestions was recorded for HNK Zagreb (19,6%) and the biggest one for HNK Varaždin (73,1%). Distribution of 3 broad categories is visible on the following figure (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Website complaints share by theatre



Source: authors' research

Furthermore, qualitative analysis of collected comments should provide more insight into areas of improvement for tested websites. Due to fact that every comment about website weakness or complaint is directed towards a specific theatre website, it makes little sense to generalize those comments on an aggregated level. However, it might be useful to notice that the vast majority of the complaints - nearly 73% were to some extent or completely related to website visual aspects or attractiveness (design elements, colour usage and proportions of text and photo content, outdated design and others). Additionally, almost 16% of complaints were directed towards usability issues (problems with navigation, hard to find information) and around 11% towards website content (lack of content, low quality content). Finally, the complaint share can serve as an additional control measure for the recorded combined mean scores.

Limitations and further research

The conducted research suffers from several limitations. The most important one is the sample selection due to the fact that students are not the representative sample of young target audience for any given theatre website in Croatia or the tested ones. On the other hand, there is enough evidence showing that student population with its limitations can be used for testing the theatre website quality. However, in addition to abovementioned arguments for choosing this type of tester sample, this limitation should be taken into consideration when deriving the conclusions from this research.

One might consider testing different sample approaches in further similar research for future reference. Furthermore, user perception is just one of the possible website evaluation approaches and it might be useful to explore and compare the given theatre websites based on several different viewpoints such as website visibility (namely, using the Weideman model (Weideman, 2009)), social media presence or theatre marketing perspective (in-depth interviews with marketing representatives of evaluated theatre websites). Finally, it should be interesting to triangulate the research problem with 3 different perspectives and compare the theatre marketing goals and efforts with user perception and experience and correlate these findings with website popularity/visibility.

Conclusion and Strategic Implications

Public theatres and other cultural institutions are in permanent struggle to reach potential audiences with generally limited resources. Simplicity, public outreach and low costs as major characteristics of websites make them a unique efficient tool for reaching and communicating with multiple audiences. Moreover, they enable active audience engagement and participation, which can contribute to overall theatre experience.

Therefore, having in mind difficulties that theatres are facing, not only in Croatia but everywhere, the major goal of this paper was to analyse students' evaluations of different aspects of theatre websites. Students were taken as representatives of young audiences who should be, as "academic citizens", the future regular consumers of theatre services. Seven public and three commercial theatre websites were tested by student respondents who might be considered experts to a certain level, since all of them have attended an E-marketing course.

The research shows that among all registered theatres in Croatia, only 68% have official websites. It indicates that theatres as well as many other cultural institutions still have not recognized the marketing potential of websites. The in-depth analysis of websites of sample theatres implies that website content had the most positive perception among respondents (5,75). However we have to note that the major contribution to this high score came from website trust, which is merely related to the institution and not website itself.

Two other measured constructs – visual attractiveness and usability of theatre websites have scored both positive (5,09 and 5,45 respectively), although we have to emphasize that respondents' expectations about finding information recorded the lowest grade. It implies that although the website content and information was of acceptable quality, accurate and easy to understand, the respondents perceived websites as merely adequate regarding their expectations. The idea of the website content is to attract potential audience to actually visit the theatre. This can be achieved only if it fulfils or, preferably, exceeds their expectations.

The overall perception of sample theatre websites was graded at 4,56. Although it is somewhat positive, to our opinion theatre websites have underutilized their potential. It can be illustrated by the fact that respondents' revisit intention and recommendation intention resulted in lowest average score compared to every other variable ($\bar{x}=4,36$ and $\bar{x}=4,43$ respectively).

Based on Website score as a composite construct, tested websites recorded a mean score of 5,21. It can be concluded that the average website score is not impressively high, but it is perceived as a generally positive.

Finally, T-test suggests significant statistical difference between national and commercial theatre website quality indicating commercial theatre websites as better performing ($p < 0,01$, $t = -3,075$, $df = 519$). However, 3 tested commercial theatres were chosen on a benchmark level which could positively influence the measured difference in recorded website scores.

In terms of strategic implications, this research indicates the underutilized websites potential as an efficient communication tool toward young audiences. They are currently created with the aim to satisfy the need for information, but the expectations of young audiences are significantly higher. To our opinion, it is high time that public cultural institutions in Croatia become more market oriented, especially toward young audiences by creating efficient communication. Two-way web communication, which not only reaches existing and potential young audiences, but also makes them an integral part of theatre product in its widest sense should be implemented.

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