EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

Boonchutima, Smith
Chulalongkorn University

ABSTRACT

The study "Evaluation Framework for Government Websites" aims to create a framework, including indicators, to evaluate government websites and explain the indicators shown in the framework. Qualitative research methodology, including in-depth interview and literature analysis, is used. Thirty-two persons were interviewed, comprising 16 public relations officers and webmasters from 8 organizations, 5 public relations academics, and 11 public relations consultants in public relation agencies and experts in website media. The interviews were conducted from April to August 2010.

The results show that government organizations in general still do not take public relations efforts seriously and seem to communicate in a one-way manner. Their websites are mainly used to disseminate information rather than to engage conversation with audiences. As for performance evaluation, they heavily rely on statistical data gathered by available computing software and rarely use other empirical data such as content analysis, attained awards and ranking, and others admiration indexes as performance indicators. The interviewees claimed that a lack of evaluation skills and resources are key hindrances. The researcher also feels that the interviewees' motive to evaluate their own performances could be another possible hindrance.

The 5-dimension and situational website evaluation frameworks have then been created based on research findings. They are mainly the adaptations from existing evaluation frameworks for public relation activities. Due to multiple indicators and measurement, evaluators still need to select indicators that can ensure results to meet their objectives without spending unnecessary time and effort on superfluous evaluation documents.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is crucial for the government sector as it is a government organization's responsibility to disseminate news and information to the general public to maintain a social order. Furthermore, government organizations need to communication regularly to display their achievements, offer public services, create public understanding, survey and monitor public opinion polls, call for support, and, ultimately, create a positive relationship with their publics. Therefore, effective communication can create a more flexible environment for the state and public cooperation (Chainun Nuntapan 2005:20).

Viruch Lapirattanakul (2001: 216-217) summarized the public relations operation process into four main steps: research - listening, planning - decision making, communication - action and evaluation. The last step, evaluation, is extremely crucial, since it can be used as a guideline for an organization to determine whether or not its entire communication effort has met its objective(s). The recommendations retrieved from the evaluation can be beneficial for current and future communication projects' success.

Communication innovation has expanded opportunities for public relations officers to directly communicate to targeted audiences, and public relations officers should make full use of

(Haig Matt 2001:3, Phnom Kleechaya 2008:11). Public relations officers have to be able to work with new media, e.g. public relations on Internet or e-public relations (e-PR). This differs from traditional public relations efforts thanks to the emerging abilities to better control and determine when and where news content should be published, while before intermediaries like news reporters, journalists, and mass media had these powers.

In addition to receiver-driven communication and multimedia richness, Internet public relations can also enhance relationships between organizations and audiences through virtual community, enabling audience with similar interests located dispersedly to convene, thus, making it more convenient for public relations officers to communicate with these hard-to-reach audience groups (Shel Holtz 1999: 61-84).

Even though a progress in digital technology is highly developed, research on website evaluation, in terms of communication, is lacking. This researcher consequently aims to construct a framework to evaluate government websites by studying public relations evaluation frameworks while considering government officers' attitudes and practices on performance evaluation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the new media, public relations officers are now able to control and determine the news, while traditional mass media only allow journalists and mass media to control content and select news before publishing (Matt Haig 2001:3; Vorvoreanu Mihaela 2007: 159-161: Phnom Kleechaya 2008:11). Online media therefore gives better opportunities for organizations to create and strengthen their relationship and reputation among their audience. Furthermore, the organization can benefit from two-way communication, which enables various organizations to directly collect data on user feedback, opinions, and suggestions.

Website visitors typically have a demand for news and information in an organization prior to visiting their website, making communication even more successful. (Vorvoreanu Mihaela 2007:159-161, Smith Boonchutima 2009). Various organizations have a long record of using the Internet as a public relations tool through websites, e-mail, online newsletters, discussion groups, e-media relations, and relationship creation with various online communities, or so-called social media (Phnom Kleechaya 2008: 14-20)

Joel Comm (2009: 3-7) said that although social media has no clear definition, it can mean story exchange on website and information exchange within a community. It is equivalent to conversations held at restaurants.

Panithan Wattayakorn revealed that the Thai government initiated a policy for ministries' spokespersons to create a Twitter and Facebook account. The objective is to disseminate news to the general public and answer inquiries about their ministry's' operations at all hours. This allows the general public to gain instant access to information without having to wait for it to be disseminated through other mediums. The information available can be beneficial to mass media and those interested publics. Twitter and Facebook can also display achievements of various ministries, which can create a healthy competition among the ministries to provide the best services possible for the general public. The Government can then proceed to establish credibility on an international level by immediately disseminating various updates and news about incidents or situations that potentially affect the country (Kom Chud Leuk, 5 November 2009).

By using online mediums effectively, not only will it create a positive relationship between government organizations and the general public, it will also attract the public to take part in an organization's activities. They can join or even create groups or fan pages to invite friends

to become fans or subscribe to receive information. Additionally, online mediums enable content to be retrieved on a global scale.

Seksud Saisisod (2006)'s determinants of the success in web communication include conducting research to form task objectives, defining the right target audience, and performing communication activities. Organizations should choose appropriate objectives and audiences when communicating online (Matt Haig 2001: 122). A website is a medium where organizations can communication with the general public that has various backgrounds; the website design must be carefully created to serve an organization's specific information dissemination needs and prevent bewilderment.

Smith Boonchutima (2010) stated that effective website design should include three essential elements: content, usability, and appearance. Content comprises the elements and information appearing on a website that must communicate with the website's target audiences. Usability refers to a website's graphics and typeface and should have a user-friendly design that includes a simple and error-free user interface for easy navigation. Appearance means that a website's graphics and typeface should have a clutter-free and consistent format throughout the website. The characteristics should be professional and conform to an organization's image.

According to Sirichai Kanchanawasri (2007:89), evaluation or "value determination" is a process that has a delicacy determined by the context and usage of merit and value, which cannot be visibly observed. Therefore, it is almost impossible to make a sound value judgment of anything. Value has a relationship with context; therefore, a separation of many context evaluation projects is better than a large overall context evaluation.

Phnom Kleechaya (1999:30) concluded that evaluation is concerned with empirical data, indicators and criteria. Evaluation can be done by observing the empirical data gathered according to assigned indicators. The status or the operating performances of the subject must be able to be reflected by such indicators. The level of evaluation, or criteria, must be specified using standard set by professionals, stakeholders' expectations, expert panels, and/or the benchmarks compared to performance history, competitors, or best practices.

Phnom Kleechaya (2008) consequently proposed Thailand's public relations operation evaluation framework and indicators on effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness consists of quantity and quality of news and activities that are disseminated through public relations. Efficiency consists of target audience rating on organization awareness, comprehension, credibility, positive image, positive relation, and behavior.

Furthermore, he also proposed indicators to determine public relations' effort success, comprising five dimensions: organization's tasks, public relations officers' tasks, target audience perception, target audience behavior, and organization's benefit.

Shel Holtz (1999:233), however, categorized public relations effectiveness measurement differently. His approach depends on target audiences and public relations activities: media relations measurement, online investor relations measurement, social relations measurement, public movement measurement, and crisis communication measurement.

Measurement used as empirical data includes many different indicators. George E. Belch and Michael A. Belch (2004: 501-504) explained that the Internet evaluation direction by the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) divided Internet effectiveness measurement standard into 5 means: ad impression (ad view), visit, unique measurement, unique user (unique visitors), page impression, and cross-media optimization studies (XMOS). Sewarit Pongsakornrangsilp (2005: 490-491) divided Internet evaluation direction into 8 means: hits, valid hits, click through rate, page views, reach, page impression, opt-in-e-mail, and log file. Gregory R. Sherwin and Emily N. Avila (1996: 353-372) explained that in order to measure the success

of public relations effort after a website has launched, the success evaluation can be considered according to the following factors: website visitors, visitors stay length, peak period, most visited page or category, and responses that reflect visitors' engagement with the organization's website.

Nuntiya Mungmee (2009) classified the analysis needed for statistical evaluation into 4 categories: visitor analysis, referrer analysis, content analysis, and operation system and browser analysis. The data for these analyses can be measured using a statistical program such as observations on unique IP, unique visitor, page views, page link, return IP, visitor, exit rate, visit depth, entrance URL, exit URL, and new visitor. With quantitative evaluation, organizations might utilize computer software for validation and evaluation. The software differs according to a websites' requirements. For example, data can be gathered through a service offered by Internet Innovation Research Center (Truehits.net), and Google Analytics statistic information service.

Other than quantity evaluation, various organizations also use marketing and communication effectiveness measurement methods. Nuntiya Mungmee (2009) conducted research on private sectors' websites and the created an evaluation framework using indicators as follows: recall and retention, comprehension, satisfactory, perception, credibility, image, engagement, awards, interest by related organizations, website ranking compared to competitors, and sales analysis. These evaluations have more variety than statistical data and able to provide in-depth and more accurate information, which can then be of use when the website management team improves their website's effectiveness and efficiency in the future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative research format, focusing on extracting evaluation methodology in previous literature to form an evaluation framework for public relations effort through a website. To understand the context of website evaluation, the research included 32 in-depth interviews consisting of 16 governmental organization's public relations officers and webmasters from 8 of Thailand's most visited government websites (2 interviewees from each), which are The Government Lottery Office, Office of the Basic Education Commission of Thailand, The Revenue Department, Department of Local Administration, The Bank of Thailand, The Public Relations Department, Office of the Civil Service Commission, and Social Security Office, 5 academics in digital media, public relations, advertising, and marketing communication, and 11 digital media specialists in advertising agencies and website companies. The data collection period was 12 months, from October 2009 till November 2010. The interview data is analyzed and used in the Discussion and Recommendations sections.

RESULTS

From communication evaluation studies conducted by many scholars (Phnom Kleechaya 1999, 2008; Smith Boonchutina 2009, 2009, 2010; Nuntiya Mungmee 2009, Shel Holtz, 1999; Belch & Belch 2004; Sherwin & Avila 1996), website evaluation framework is shown in the table below:

Evaluation framework for government public relations websites adapted from Phnom Kleechaya's five-dimension public relations evaluation framework		
1. First Dimension: Organization's website and public relations effort conformity		
Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
1.1	Website content and presentation conforms to organization's public relations objective(s)	Analyze website's content and presentation and compare to organization's public relations objective(s)

| 1.2 | Website appearance conforms to public relations objective(s) | Analyze website's appearance and compare to organization's public relations objective(s) |

2. Second Dimension: Website effectiveness
2.1 Quantity and Quality

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
2.1.1	Number of news available for general public to download or utilize	Electronic Counter: download hits Count the sent e-mail
2.1.2	Number of news disseminated in mass media	Electronic Counter
2.1.3	News coverage in both online and tradition media	News clipping and Count Calculate the coverage into PR value
2.1.4	Position of news disseminated in mass media	Observation
2.1.5	The presence and accuracy of key message in the news disseminated	Content Analysis
2.1.6	The number of audience with opportunity to exposure to the disseminated news through website	Electronic Counter Calculate
2.1.7	Number of people accessing an online news announcement	Electronic Counter: Log in IP, Unique IP, New Visitor, Opt-in-email, Page View
2.1.8	Capital saved from communication through website	Calculate the cost differences between online and offline communication

2.2 Worthiness in Investment

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
2.2.1	Number of audience(s) exposed to disseminated materials through organization's website or online medium	Electronic Counter: Unique IP, New Visitor, Opt-in-email, Page views
2.2.2	Number of people with opportunity for exposure to disseminated materials through mass media that use the materials from organization's website	Calculate the circulation of the publication or rating of the program
2.2.3	Amount of money after converting the news coverage to advertisement cost	Calculate the coverage into ad value
2.2.4	Amount of web admin team's work load	Calculate the man-hour cost

2.3 Completing objectives

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
2.3.1	Changes according to the website's objective	Survey Observation
2.3.1	Reaching target audience	Surveys Electronic Counter: Registrations, Keyword search, Bounce rate, Average time on site, Domain before entry

3. Third Dimension: Target audience perception
3.1 Awareness

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
3.1.1	Number of visitor(s)	Electronic counter: Unique IP
3.1.2	Number of audience(s) exposed to content on website and website's online medium	Electronic counter: Unique IP

3.2 Understanding

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
3.2.1	Content disseminated in website characteristic	Content analysis

| 3.2.2 | Mass media use of organization's website as information source | Observation
Electronic counter: Log in IP, Opt-in-email |
| 3.2.3 | Organization's general officers ability to explain how to use their organization's website | Observation |

3.3 Image

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
3.3.1	Contents that appear in online media	Observation Content analysis
3.3.2	Number of audience exposed to website or online medium related to the organizations	Electronic counter: Unique IP
3.3.3	Officers pride for organization's website	Observation Survey
3.3.4	Popularity of organization's website	Observation Survey Search engine ranking comparison Website ranking Number of request for link, banner exchange
3.3.5	Confidence and trust in organization's website	Observation Survey Research Website ranking
3.3.6	Qualified individuals wish to work for organization's website	Observation Survey

3.4 Credibility

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
3.4.1	Mass media use of content of organization's website	Observation
3.4.2	Online activities acceptable for related individuals	Observation Survey
3.4.3	Number of requests for in-depth information	Observation
3.4.4	Executives/web masters invited to seminars on how to maintain website(s)	Observation
3.4.5	Praise for being a successful website	Observation
3.4.6	Award from other organization	Observation
3.4.7	Public opinion polling conducted by other organization(s)	Survey

3.5 Satisfaction

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
3.5.1	Complaints about website	Count
3.5.2	Website users' satisfaction	Survey using vital variables: Content variable Image variable Ease of use variable

4. Fourth Dimension: Target audience behavior
4.1 Positive Relationship

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
4.1.1	Webmaster's relationship with mass media and general website users	Observation
4.1.2	Mass media request for information, validate information, or notification of websites before publishing news about a	Observation

	organization	
4.1.3	Webmaster ability to request users to restrain from posting negative comments or disseminate news that will tarnish the organization's reputation	Observation
4.1.4	Webmaster or officers welcome when entering an online community	Observation
4.1.5	Good cooperation from other departments in the organization when requesting information.	Observation

4.2 Desired Behavior

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
4.2.1	Website users' behavior change in accordance to website's objective(s)	Observation Survey
4.2.2	Number of visitors and number of users participating in provided online activities	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Unique IP, Return IP
4.2.3	Frequent website usage	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Unique IP, Return IP
4.2.4	Discussion about information disseminated through the website	Observation Content Analysis
4.2.5	Extensive knowledge search, e.g. clicking on the provided link(s)	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Log File
4.2.6	Number of service users, e.g. paying tax online	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Unique IP, Return IP
4.2.7	Number of letters to encourage webmaster	Observation Content Analysis
4.2.8	Participation in website polling	Observation Content Analysis Content Analysis Electronic counter: Log in IP, Unique IP

5. Fifth Dimension: Organization and public relations department receiving benefit(s) that might result from website

5.1 Result

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
5.1.1	Number of users	Electronic counter: Unique IP, Return IP, New visitors
5.1.2	Privilege(s)	Observation
5.1.3	Number of active volunteers	Count and/or Electronic counter: Unique IP, Return IP, New visitors
5.1.4	Number of people disseminating news	Observation
5.1.5	Change in budget	Calculation the differences in budget
5.1.6	Target audience(s) attitude towards organization or public relations department when demanding related information	Survey
5.1.7	Organization loyalty	Observation Survey
5.1.8	Decrease in budget from other media production	Calculation the differences in budget.

5.2 Operation tranquility and crisis prevention

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
5.2.1	Converse or negotiation tranquility with other unit(s)	Observation
5.2.2	Website user(s) assistance and problem solving	Observation

| 5.2.3 | Website users notification of problems when encountered | Observation |
| 5.2.4 | Reach to target audience(s) that were previously difficult to reach | Observation
Electronic counter: Unique IP, Location, Time
Calculation the cost differences between online and offline media to reach such hard-to-reach groups |

Public relations officers can use the criteria and measurement method in the following table to evaluate website and online media according to public relations' target audience(s) and communication situation. Evaluating an individual activity usually provides a clearer solution to improve operations. The following evaluation frameworks are adapted from Holtz (1999):

Evaluation framework for government public relations websites adapted from Holtz's evaluation concept

Online activities with mass media

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
1	Number of mass media that provided their E-mail address	Count
2	Number of mass media that subscribed to E-mail news notification(s)	Count
3	Number of mass media that registered on the online section created specifically for the media	Count Electronic counter: Log in IP
4	Number of news and document downloads made by mass media	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Download hits
5	Number of e-electronic news releases requested by mass media	Electronic counter: Log in IP, Download hits
6	Number of contacts from mass media provided via the website.	Count
7	Number of mass media participating in online activities, e.g. online press conference	Electronic counter: Log in IP

Online Activities with Government Offices

Item	Criterion	Measurement Method
1	Number of organization or officers responding to E-mail news notifications	Count
2	Number of officers that registered on the online section created specifically for government officers	Count Electronic counter: Log in IP

Online Activities with Community and General Public

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
1	Number of online survey responses	Count and/or count using electronic counter
2	Number of received comments	Count and/or count using electronic counter
2	Survey result and comment characteristics	Content Analysis
3	Number of website visitors	Electronic Counter: Unique IP, New Visitor, Return Visitor, Page views
4	Amount of declined capital invested from conversion from traditional media	Calculate the cost differences between online and offline communication
5	Number of audience(s) that were not reached using traditional media	Calculation the cost differences between online and offline media to reach such hard-to-reach groups

Dispute and Crisis Management Communication

Item	Criterion Used	Measurement Methodology
1	Saved capital from crisis-free	Calculation the possible cost differences between crisis-free and crisis situation
2	Number and characteristics of online comments	Count and/or electronic counter Content Analysis
3	Number of visitors during time of crisis	Electronic Counter: Unique IP, New Visitor, Return Visitor, Page views
4	Number of online news releases published by mass media in time of crisis	Observation Count

DISCUSSION

The discussion is divided into 3 main issues: website characteristic and management, current website evaluation, and proposed evaluation framework.

The research found that some of the executives may not realize the importance of public relations effort. As websites are an innovative medium, executives have the perception that the Thai general population do not have the access; therefore, budget and resources dedicated to website public relations are still lacking. Although public relations is now considered important to government organizations, the priority of for effort is dissimilar to that of the private sector organization where image and uniqueness are more emphasized to increase sales (Yubol Benjarongkij, Kannigah Asavadorndeja & Rungnapa Pitpreecha, 2009). This may be because each government organization has their unique functions and objectives. Therefore, they see no need to communicate uniqueness.

Website structure and content characteristics aim to disseminate an organization's news and announcements, and to increase convenience by providing more communication channel choices, which conforms to the public relations effort of the majority of government organizations (Phnom Kleechaya 2008). This also assists the government and general public to have better cooperation as mentioned by Chainun Nuntapun (2005:20). However, the research result found that public relations technical officers and academics said that website appearance, the most essential variable for user satisfaction, is still not able to satisfy website users. This may be because organizations emphasize on providing information in a formal manner and, thus, lack the user-friendly design. A good website should be continually adjusted to changing generations and should be adjusted to user familiarity and functionality. Clutter and out-of-date web design are usually weaknesses of government organizations. This coincides with previous research findings (Smith Boonchutima, 2010).

There are still government organizations not focusing on developing an online community relationship with the general public, but using a website as an informal communication channel among officers. This may be because an online community offers an opportunity for users to create their own content, causing lack of information screening, which could then lead to false information dissemination.

While government organizations emphasize the accuracy of information for the purpose of becoming a credible referencing source, some public relations professionals and scholars insist that the online community can be included as part of a government website if it has adjusted to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. For example, the web admin should determine interaction level, like leave comments, or determine procedure for a message to be disseminated. In general, government organizations in this study still have never used online community as a communication tool, which still does not meet with Panithan Wattanayakorn's suggestion (as cited in Kom Chud Leuk, 5 November 2009). Moreover, some officers are concerned about their organization or national security when the popular social media websites are now owned by transnational, rather than local, companies.

The vital problems that website management teams raised are a slow response to user requests or technical problems. This can be caused by an unorganized administration system and, sometimes, by the fact that the website is developed and managed by external organizations, so-called outsources. Therefore, when a problem occurs, only the external organization can fix it. Furthermore, the bureaucracy in purchase and billing can also slow down the process of tackling the problems. As mentioned by Seksun Saisisod (2006), an organization should always update information to meet its users' information needs, as content and user-friendliness are key determinants of user's satisfaction according to Smith Boonchutima (2010). Effective website management shows users an organization's capability and technological advancement (Bhatnagar 2004:27) which will improve the organization's credibility among users.

Research results found that interviewees usually say that the website that they are in charge of usually receives less budget than other media. This might be because the initial cost for a website is less than, for example, television or prints. Therefore, the budget might not be the key issue as long as it is sufficient to allow website management to increase or maintain their website's effectiveness. Government organizations should, therefore, consider a sufficient budget allocation.

According to the research, government organizations usually use an electronic counter ,which is a computer program to measure and then use the data to evaluate their public relations website. The data gathered depend on the program used to create the website. Truehits.net and Google Analytics are the most popular tools for statistical data collection.

The statistical data, which government organizations often measure, can be gathered daily, monthly or yearly. The details of indicators in this statistic assessment are Unique IP, Unique Visitor, Page views, Page link, Return IP, Visitor, Exit Rate, Visit Depth, Entrance URL, Exit URL, and New visitors, for example. The results are then used to interpret the number of website visitors in a day or a month, number of new visitors (Unique IP), number of return visitors (Return IP), number of registered member and survey participants (Registrations and Surveys), and number of visitors who would like to receive news (Opt-in-e-mail). Moreover, some organizations' web performance reports also include a list of domain names before visitors enter their organization's websites (Referral domain), list of search engines bringing the visitors to the website (Search Engine), list of words the user typed in the search engine's search box (Search keyword), list of popular pages (Page Views), the average length of time the user spends on their sites (Average Time on Site), the average number of pages per one user's visit (Pages/Visit or Visit Depth), the average number of visitors leaving the site in a few seconds after the homepage is completely downloaded (Bounce Rate or Exit Rate), and the URL of the website that the visitors use to view the website (URL), in the case that the organization owns more than one official URL.

The above indicators can be gathered by electronic counters and can be used in coordination with the performance assessment as Sherwin and Avila (1996: 353-372) suggested and emphasized on measurement of visiting number, visiting time, visiting period, and visiting page or category. This also conforms to the Internet Advertising Bureau that emphasizes statistical information should be recorded when evaluating Internet communication.

Statistic data collection can also record user language, operating system, browser, display resolution, and Flash version. These inputs are collected for website technical officers to evaluate whether the website conforms to user computer technical requirements or not, to what extent, and user technical trends. In addition, the data can be used to plan website development to reduce technical obstacles. This leads to better usability, one of the most important factors of user satisfaction, in relation to Smith Boonchutima's (2010) concept, concluding that website user satisfaction level correlates to website content and usability respectively.

From the interviews, government organizations appear to not regularly measure indicators related to communication impact assessment, which will show how their websites affect the audience exposed to information from their organization's website. The indicators are recalling, recognizing, comprehension, satisfaction, attitude, reliability, website reputation, online activity and service interests. Website visitors are not interviewed, observed, or asked to participate in surveys because of a lack of budget and resources. Furthermore, organization administrators might not adequately emphasize the importance of public relations, especially Internet communication. The attitude towards communication and mediums among officers is also an obstacle to improve communication quality, and this should be rectified. The officers should be aware that the online medium is now increasingly influential and accessible by the general public.

Additionally, indicators like an award presented to the website, interest gained by other related organizations' websites, website ranking higher than competitors, and search engine ranking have never been included to assess the performance of government websites, which is a contradiction with research conducted by Nuntiya Mungmee (2009), who conducted a study on private sector organization's website evaluative framework. This is because government websites are not competing with other organizations'. Each organization has its own responsibilities and tasks; therefore, a website evaluation might not seem important, and this might include other general public relations activity evaluation as well. In other words, government organizations lack the motivation to improve their service unlike private organizations. Furthermore, acquiring empirical data without using an electronic counter usually costs budget, resources, time, and evaluation skills that some government organizations are unable to afford.

The success or value of a government organization's public relations through websites is determined by continual visits by users. This could be because this can reflect the trust of the service offered, especially when the service is related to online transactions like tax payment. This confirms research by Kreuhmas Muntarbhornn (2004) which illustrates that website owner credibility is a primary factor for a user to determine user whether they will use the service. Furthermore, one indicator that can be measured is a decrease in the number of phone calls enquiring information, because users are able to acquire the information themselves when the website is considered adequately credible.

An organization's website value can mostly be measured with indicators through observation. The relationship among characteristics needs to be interpreted and analyzed before public relations can make a conclusion of a public relations effort's value, or "positive relationship" with stakeholders. While the positive relationship is a universal value and cannot be easily observed, different kinds of data need to be integrated for evaluation.

Based on the public relations evaluation framework by Phnom Kleechaya (2008), online public relation officers can utilize five dimensions: organization's website and public relation effort conformity, public relations website effectiveness, target audience perception, target audience behavior, and organization benefits, for a comprehensive website evaluation. Compared to offline evaluation, web evaluation can be conducted faster as many kinds of statistical data can be gathered by electronic counters embedded in the website.

Empirical data to evaluate a government organization's success can be classified into two categories, quantitative empirical data and qualitative empirical data.

The quantitative empirical data or statistical data of the user can be collected by electronic counters. This methodology conforms with the Internet Advertising Bureau using a statistical program to validate, e.g. observing unique IP, unique visitor, page views, page link, return IP, visitor, exit rate, visit depth, entrance URL, exit URL, and new visitor.

The qualitative empirical data does have various indicators, including recall, recognition, comprehension, satisfaction, perception, credibility, website's image, online activity participation, and services that the organization's target audience use.

Methods for measuring indicators for public relations website evaluation that affect target audiences vary, e.g. surveys, focus groups, e-mail questionnaires, emails to webmaster analysis, blogs' comment analysis, chat rooms' comment analysis, forums' comment analysis, number of people downloading news releases, number of seminar participants, number of website prospective employees, number of transactions, and number of website members.

These indicators are adapted from the public relations evaluation framework and other related website evaluation frameworks that were presented earlier. (Phnom Kleechaya 2008; Nuntiya Mungmee 2009; Smith Boonchutima 2010).

Websites not only help disseminate organization news and information, they also facilitate developing a positive organization image and relationship with stakeholders as well as help transaction operation and increase payment channels for government organizations, resulting in an increase in organization profits with decreased cost. Organizations may not need to pay for letters and leaflets because service users can read news and information about payment through an organization's website (Shel Holtz 1999).

Each document on a Home Page is equivalent to one leaflet document page and can contain the same amount of content, which can reach target audiences through a speedy and broader channel. Organizations can use e-mail to directly deliver the information. Success can then be determined statistically by measuring the number of website users compared to the number of call center users or number of logged-in website visitors and lists of users that use the website transaction service, which conforms to Fraser Likely's (2004) research in return on investment. To prove that these innovative communication tools help organizations to save money, public relations officers must calculate the outcomes of their operations how much and if it is worth the investment, as mentioned in Somchai Aksornruk and Wasin Pornwasin (2004:118).

Likely (2004) concluded that when creating an activity to enhance a positive relationship with stakeholders, especially customers, mass media, and investors, or an organization's reputation and loyalty, public relations officers should also design how their communication operation can be measured and evaluated. This is because the result is a reflection of return on investment, which is why the public relations website evaluation framework should be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Before using the evaluation framework and indicators from this research and adapt to their usage, organizations should consider the indicators to match their organization's public relations' objectives, context, readiness, capability, and characteristics. Because this research studied only 8 governmental organizations that received the highest visits, this may not be representative of average visited government organizations' websites.

Furthermore, organizations should consider other indicators that do not rely on a counting program, e.g. observing relationship with mass media, user satisfaction, change in behavior and attitude, and other benefits the organization receives from their website.

There should be a research study using indicators from this research to examine usage. The observational research can develop a better set of indicators to assess public relations websites. Further studies relating to the determination of each indicator's standard in order to use them as benchmarks for judging the success of public relation websites that are accepted among public relations officers in the future is also of essential. Last but not least, research should be conducted to a develop measurement methods and tools to collect more accurate,

convenient, and affordable data. This is because the key constraints of website evaluation are the availability of tools, time, and team members with evaluation skills.

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