

National Science Fund: Adaptation of the Cultural Institutions in Bulgaria to the New Reality – Practice from Social Networks

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Abstract

Introduction: 3.8 billion people are social media users, which is almost half of the world's population. The situation in Bulgaria is identical – in 2021 in Bulgaria there are over 4.53 million users of social networks (which is approximately 65.7% of the Bulgarian population), and the trend is that by 2026 they will be over 5 million. All this only proves that the presence in social networks is more than mandatory, and it can only bring positives for each organization or institution. **The aim** of the paper is to compare the activity of the regional libraries and the regional history museums in Bulgaria in the period 13 March-13 May 2020, when a state of emergency was declared, all institutions were closed, and all people had to stay at home, with the situation today. In this way we can trace how they managed to adapt to the completely new and unknown situation then with today, when this reality is already our new reality. **Results:** Some good examples for innovative approaches in the field of non-formal education in the Internet environment are presented. This is part of the research activities of project team of young scientists – students, PhD students and postdoctoral students from the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (Sofia, Bulgaria), are developing a research project KP 06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019 entitled: “Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria”, funded by the National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science. **Conclusions:** With the millions of apps, websites, and other platforms for people to communicate through media that are all over the Internet these days, this is truly the age of social media. But the pandemic for almost two years now imposes restrictions that came with it and led to even greater living in the online space.

Keywords: social networks, cultural institutions, new reality, regional history museum, regional library, Bulgaria

1. Introduction

In today's society, the use of social media has become a necessary daily activity.

Social media has changed the way we all interact with each other online. In many senses, social media has helped many individuals find common ground with others online, making the world seem more approachable. [1] 4.5 billion people are social media users, which is more than half of the world's population. The situation in Bulgaria is identical – in 2021 in Bulgaria there are over 4.53 million users of social networks (which is approximately 65.7% of the Bulgarian population), and the trend is that by 2026 they will be over 5 million. [2] Facebook is the most popular social network in Bulgaria – 97.6%

of the social media users have chosen Facebook.

That is why it is extremely important for cultural institutions, which for the purposes of the study are limited to regional history museums and regional libraries, to have a presence on social media, in this case Facebook as the most popular one in Bulgaria. In this way, they will be able to reach most of the population and spread their activities. This is especially important after the world has been battling the COVID-19 pandemic for two years now. But social exclusion cannot and should not be a reason to restrict access to cultural institutions, especially with the ICT boom. The introduction of augmented and virtual reality technologies is crucial, and their promotion with the help of social media is more than recommended, mostly because the new user interfaces are designed in a much more visual and intuitive way. [3]

The research is part of a research project KP 06-M35/3 from 18.12.2019 entitled: "Research of contemporary educational programs of cultural institutions in Bulgaria", funded by the National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science, led by Chief Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD. The aim of the project is to study the various educational activities that are implemented in two of the organizations within the institutional system of cultural heritage – museums and libraries in the country. Until now, they have not been a subject of a comprehensive study to systematize and categorize the sustainable, long-term, and thematic educational programs implemented by them in recent years.

2. Methodology

The goal of this paper is to summarize the activities of the regional history museums and regional libraries in the Republic of Bulgaria in the social network Facebook in the conditions of lockdown, as the period is limited from 13 March to 13 May 2020 – a period of total closure of institutions given the epidemiological situation around the world; with the situation today – two years after COVID-19 changed our lives and the "new normal" becomes absolutely reality. The methodology for achieving the main objective of the study and solving the set research tasks include the following specific methods: social media analysis and comparative analysis. The method of research and content analysis is applied in the identification, systematization, summarization, and analysis of the selected information.

3. Results

The study covers one national history museum, one national library, 27 regional history museums and 27 regional libraries in Bulgaria. It considers the geographical location of the respective cultural institution, relative to the regional administrative division in the country, covering six planning areas, each of which includes from 4 to 5 regional cities.

The page of the National History Museum in Sofia has the most followers in both periods, and in one year their audience grew by nearly 300 followers. If we consider only the regional history museums, however, the largest number of followers for 2021 and 2022 has the page of the Regional History Museum in Ruse – for 2021 there are 7500 and for 2022 – 8124. The situation with regional libraries is a little different. The Sofia Library has the largest number of followers for both years – 13100 for 2021 and 14776 for 2022, recording a growth of over 1600 followers. The biggest growth of new followers is noted by the page of the Regional History Museum in Burgas – from 6237 in 2021 it increased by 927 and reached 7160 in 2022. Even greater growth is noted by the page

of the Regional Library in Burgas – from 2116 in 2021 with new 1856 reaches 3972 in 2022.

All Facebook pages and both types of cultural institutions show sustainable and stable growth during the period. They are relatively active in their publishing activities, which is why they are growing in popularity.

Area/City	Regional History Museum (2021)	Regional History Museum (2022)	Regional Library (2021)	Regional Library (2022)
Southwest area				
Blagoevgrad	6500	6900	1400	1789
Kyustendil	3114	3448	1300	1918
Pernik	2100	2353	730	800
Sofia – Regional/National	2910/ 10800	3361/ 11083	13100/ 3400	14776/ 3900
South Central area				
Kardzhali	2125	2396	1285	1369
Pazardzhik	1388	1554	2159	2349
Plovdiv	6447	6865	5474	6211
Smolyan	3256	3616	325	716
Haskovo	4036	4194	1568	1824
Southeast area				
Stara Zagora	4089	4612	3496	3692
Sliven	2297	2423	335	412
Yambol	1150	1442	1294	1398
Burgas	6237	7160	2116	3972
Northeast area				
Varna	2170	2376	4739	5044
Dobrich	2225	2347	1410	2145
Targovishte	2062	2491	2041	2260
Shumen	6500	7018	2597	2829
North Central area				
Veliko Tarnovo	6700	7279	1387	1560
Gabrovo	2525	2759	2134	2263
Razgrad	6811	6802	1623	1705
Ruse	7500	8124	6139	6702
Silistra	2253	2595	2021	2293
Northwest area				
Vidin	1597	2462	3517	4132
Vratsa	3591	3965	3158	3622
Montana	1111	1199	3676	4297
Pleven	5737	6060	2266	2398
Lovech	2500	2838	1627	1759

Table 1. Number of followers on the official Facebook pages of regional history museums and regional libraries, divided into six areas – data compared to January 2021 and data compared to January 2022

Publications about initiatives and activities of most university, city and school libraries, as well as libraries of community centres and other cultural institutions are present in the pages of the cultural institutions, object of this study.

As good practices per every area could be pointed:

- Southwest area – Regional History Museum in Sofia launched its special online series called “Sofia Puzzle”. In the series “places are intertwined with facts, events, retro photos from the Museum’s collection, as well as emblematic exhibits”. The Regional Library in Blagoevgrad they offer instructions for painting eggs with wax and red beets, showing their creations.
- South Central area – Regional History Museum in Kardzhali shared with its audience a link to a virtual tour of the museum’s halls, which is actively shared on Facebook. There is also active work with local radio stations that broadcast information about the museum’s exhibits. The Regional library in Pazardzhik share videos with the children from Primary school “L. Karavelov” – Pazardzhik that participate, together with the library in online reading on the occasion of the Reading Marathon.
- Southeast area – Regional History Museum in Burgas – the four expositions of the Burgas Museum offer a virtual tour with 360 degrees shooting in Google Maps. The appeal to the audience reads “View them freely while you stay at home!” and this post is actively shared by users. The Regional library in Burgas tries to engage readers by publishing works, jokes, and pranks related to libraries, librarians, reading, and books.
- Northeast area – Regional History Museum in Dobrich in which a poetry competition is held for students aged 13 to 19. In connection with Easter, a video greeting was published by a student who is a member of the Club “Do you know Bulgarian?” at the Dobrich school “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The Regional library “Dora Gabe” in Dobrich offers “an easy way to be informed and of course to have fun with a variety of virtual cultural walks. The online series “Once Upon a Time” are started with reading fairy tales.
- North Central area – Regional History Museum in Silistra presents an initiative, through which they periodically publish photos and a link to the Facebook page of their partner project Liverobg. Thus, they present 3D models of artifacts that have been digitized under the ROBG-9 ARCHIVE project. The Regional library in Veliko Tarnovo offers the service “Delivery of books to homes”, and subsequently extended it until the end of the state of emergency.
- Northwest area – Regional History Museum in Vratsa launches a series of announcements related to the popularization of interesting artifacts from the museum fund has also started. The educational activity of the museum is reflected in the new section in the YouTube channel of the museum, where video lessons are published, aimed at the youngest audience – children. The Regional library in Vratsa celebrates the International Day of Fairy Tales – 20th March, with the fantastic story created by the participants in the creative writing training in the library, within the project “Teenagers in the Library”.

4. Conclusions

The pandemic of COVID-19 continues to be a tough emergency situation related to the social health on national and global scale. The extension of the emergency epidemic situation in regard with the spread of COVID-19 on the territory of the country will provide an opportunity the application of anti-epidemic measures to be continued thus avoiding

the overload of the health care system and the system of social health. [4] In summary, we can say that the cultural organizations in question intensify their activities to create posts on social networks by creating virtual exhibitions, virtual walks, activating YouTube channels by adding new videos with interesting and curious facts about the preservation of cultural values. Some of them are also related to the promotion of the intangible cultural heritage, given the numerous publications aimed at the traditional spring holiday calendar. Most of these activities have established themselves as good practices and have become part of cultural institutions services, making them an even more accessible place for users to rely on in emergencies. [5]

Presenting good examples of the activity of regional libraries on Facebook in the condition of full lockdown is a current topic that is being studied by other researchers as well. Thus, the scientific community has the opportunity to exchange information and enrich research to summarize the overall picture of the transformation, which was carried out in a short time and in force majeure conditions for rapid adaptation and contact with the public of cultural institutions in the country.

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For more information: Official website of the project – <https://educulture.unibit.bg/>; Facebook page – <https://www.facebook.com/eduCulturebg>

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