

MEDIA WEBSITES AND ONLINE BROWSING. A STUDY CASE - RADIO ROMÂNIA IAȘI

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Abstract

The paradigm change from traditional to digital media has numerous angles of approach. One of them is tracking the type of devices used by consumers in order to access a particular media product. Although radio stations are constantly aired and listened to in real-time, using receiver devices, their online extension is subject to changes in consumption habits. Thus, broadcasters are in a continuous search for new editorial directions in order to face digital media competition and appearances on search engines. Radio online platforms that offer daily news, audio and video streamings often meet new challenges in order to adapt to current tendencies of connection. This study emphasizes how online outputs of a regional public radio such as Radio România Iași are being accessed using data from Google Analytics, underlining the consumption behaviour of the interested user and stressing a market tendency in this regard.

Keywords: *behavior, consumption, online, radio, user.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Online radio broadcasting in Romania is at its early stage in terms of market development and current data availability. Until now, research and analysis have been conducted only on a narrow basis regarding the use of this particular means of mass-communication throughout the Internet. How do radio broadcasters adapt to the new ways of consuming and to which extent are they using their online content in order to reach their users? This question widens the research path in order to analyse how the Internet offers an additional consumer behavior that traditional radio-broadcasters can use to distribute the content.

Nowadays, new technologies are not only based on capturing information, but rather on the freedom and feedback of participants. By providing a platform that enables collaboration among users, technologies create the basis for recording a wide variety of interactions and a permanent exchange of information. The information is captured while it is created,

without the need for extra work. Thus, listening is not the sole operation for a potential user; he can also view the content of a program to some degree, as LIND & MEDOFF (1999) suggest.

In Romania, the top 5 most visited radio websites, indexed by SATI - Europa FM, PRO FM, Radio Zu, Virgin Radio and Kiss FM - reach over 70% of their overall traffic (data gathered from December 2018) from mobile devices. According to a Consumer Barometer by Google, in 2017, 70% of Romanian Internet users say that they use the smartphone at least as much as desktop to surf online. SECELEANU (2018) notes that at the beginning of 2018 the smartphone market has increased, reaching over 40%.

More and more voices claim that Web 2.0 has enabled the traditional audience to become active in the public, and here I refer to the condition when the target audience becomes not only a consumer, but a prosumer, who in turn sets a new order for the editorial and advertising products of a media outlet. In fact, CORDEIRO (2012) suggests that the access to an increasing offer of content on different platforms and formats developed by radio broadcasters has an influence in the emergence of a new audience - which is non-traditional, non-passive but participative and independent. COMAN (2009) argues that practicing journalism in an online radio means combining all types of traditional journalism, from written press to TV, but at the same time it could mean none of the traditional forms at all.

Judging by the structure of the digital platforms, we can argue that the radio can be present nowadays via desktop, laptop, smartphones and various other gadgets when we speak about browsing. BERRY (2014) stresses that "it is a recognition that contemporary radio listening may be via devices with a screen".

Whereas they are fixed or mobile, the number of devices that can access radio platforms multiplied in the last decade, offering new capabilities to online users. PIPER & McWHINNIE (2005) paraphrases Reidar Wasenius says that the radio and the mobile phone are in a relation of producer and distributor and at the same time other types of content can be complementary to audio streaming already installed on the phone.

Browsing through websites that have adapted their platform for smartphone-screen watching has increased in the last years. With higher memory integrated within their operating system, smartphones are able to access further forms of web content. GIBBS (2016) emphasized that the mobile devices have already overtaken the traditional computers for web browsing and the gap keeps on spreading as websites continue to increase their level of adaptability for these types of devices, using responsive platforms that allow an easy navigation, no matter the device you use is on. Speaking about WordPress themes, CASABONA (2014) argues that this platform offers numerous built-in features that can be exploited by developers in order to create better responsive websites.

2. ACCESSING RADIOIASI.RO ONLINE FEATURES - A STUDY CASE

Radio România Iași is a regional public radio, part of the Romanian Radiobroadcasting Society, with a targeted audience which is expanded through the entire Moldavian region of the country (8 counties - Botoșani, Suceava, Iași, Vaslui, Bacău, Neamț, Galați and Focșani), with small signal reception also in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This particular radio station offers informative, cultural, musical, entertainment and national minority programs for target audiences. According to the latest audience data provided from April 23 to August 20, 2018, (the summer wave) by the Radio Audience Study which was completed by IMAS - Marketing and Surveys SA and MERCURY RESEARCH S.R.L., Radio România Iași is the most listened to regional radio in the country, with a daily number of 396.700 listeners and a market share of 2%. In terms of commercial public, Radio România Iași totalizes a daily number of 107.000 and a 1 percent market share.

Its official website - www.radioiasi.ro - has suffered continuous change in order to adapt to the digital new media characteristics and to perform the necessary rigors of interactivity and frequent updated content features.

Before 2014, the online products offered by Radio Iasi were dissipated among many separate webpages, such as radioiasi.ro, portal.radioiasi.ro, folclor.radioiasi.ro and so on. Starting from September 2014, since Radio România Iasi has adopted a new WordPress platform, its online identity has seen a significant increase in both qualitative and quantitative coordinates, responding to the requirements of the online market, without departing from the deontological and ethical norms in the journalistic field.

This achievement is supported by a much richer web offer included in a single online product that has come to address a generous range of journalistic species, counting over 40,000 articles since its launch and a wide range of streaming possibilities. The new platform combines various possibilities of increased content interactivity with the listeners such as music top voting systems, online comments, integrated video stream platforms and social media built-in interactions.

From 2015 to 2018, the period under review, radioiasi.ro has exploited the most of the WordPress platforms launched in 2014 and has provided a balanced online content to the public, delivered promptly and with respect to the rules of ethics and journalistic deontology. Social media associated accounts have become a rapid distribution vehicle for promoting content.

Radio România Iași has adapted its World Wide - Responsive Magazine WordPress Theme to a broader offer of products - from news, interviews, reportages, radio shows to audio/video streaming, musical top voting application and program/contact information. With built-in shortcuts, sidebars and different layout styles, the theme, as the title itself states, offers a responsive reliance on any devices.

The latest data from 2018 (Fig. 1) underline an aspect that is worth mentioning - the distribution of the traffic through countries of access and here we can remark the presence in the following 4 positions (after Romania) of the Republic of Moldova, Italy, France and the United Kingdom

of Great Britain, which indicates the relevance of online news at national and international level (for Romanian citizens in the diaspora).

The specific consumption pattern indicates a time spent for one, up to two items, and the “landing” way on the site is done both by promoting articles on the Facebook page and by the good ranking of articles on Google’s results for different searches by keywords (BRAT, 2019).

Tară	Utilizatori	% Utilizatori
1. Romania	642.567	69,31 %
2. Moldova	95.897	10,34 %
3. Italy	35.396	3,82 %
4. France	26.667	2,88 %
5. United Kingdom	26.208	2,83 %
6. United States	16.711	1,80 %
7. Germany	16.398	1,77 %
8. Poland	9.925	1,07 %
9. Spain	9.899	1,07 %
10. Ukraine	4.574	0,49 %

Fig. 1. Google Analytics Data for radioiasi.ro 2018 – accessing the website / country of origin criteria

Since 2015, the mobile web browsing has been growing fast, while users accessing radioiasi.ro through their desktop have been losing share. Both desktop and mobile platforms are united under the same web product and provide the same content. Starting from April

21, 2015, Google announced that its search engine will prioritize mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal. Thus, mobile responsive websites will be easier to rank in mobile search results than before. Starting from that date, users can find optimized content for their mobile devices in an easier and much more relevant manner, whereas mobile-friendly applications and platforms will pen on top of the Google’s search engine results. In this regard, radioiasi.ro manages to pass the Googlecompatibility test that checks if a particular webpage is responsive or not.

Sterling (2015) notes that on May 5, 2011, more Google searches take place on mobile devices than on computers in 10 countries including the US and Japan. The same situation can be identified in Romania’s case, judging by the data the Consumer Barometer 2017 by Google Data which I have emphasised earlier in this article.

In 2015 (Fig. 2), Google Analytics figures for www.radioiasi.ro show that desktop access had still and important share among users, with an indicator of 48,84% of unique visitors. The increase of mobile access is synchronized with additional improvements made to the WordPress platform in text size and hyperlinks shown on smartphone and tablet touchscreens in a continuous manner and of course, in accordance with the changes in the search engines algorithms (CONSUMER BAROMETER, n.d.).

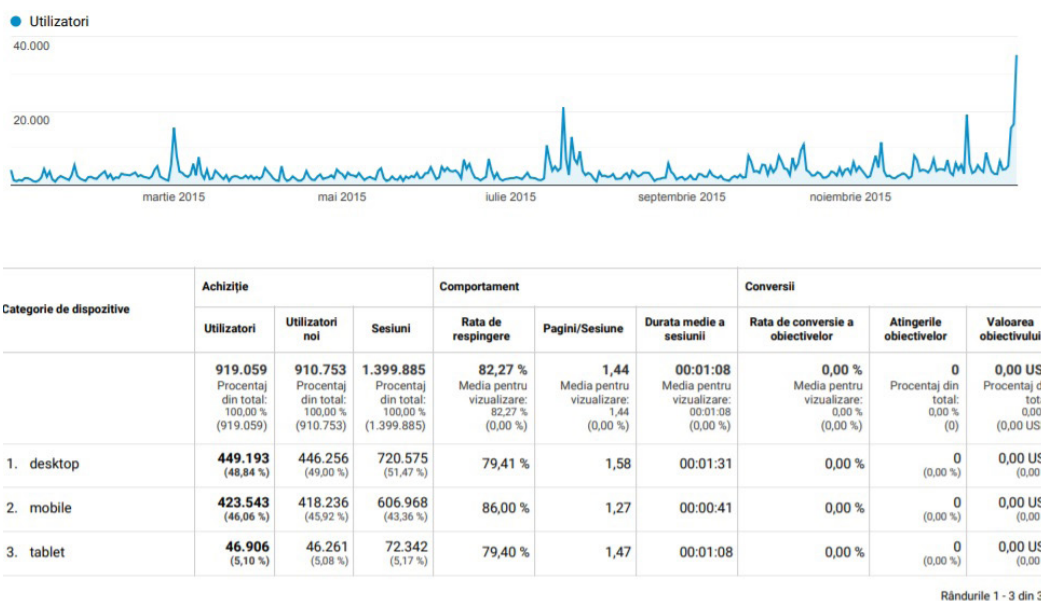


Fig. 2. Google Analytics Data for radioiasi.ro 2015 – accessing the website / device category criteria

In 2016 (Fig. 3), Google Analytics figures for www.radioiasi.ro underline the first major shift in user behavior when it comes to accessing the online platform. The data show that 60.19% of

unique visitors have accessed radioiasi.ro through mobile devices, leaving the desktop with a share of 35.45%

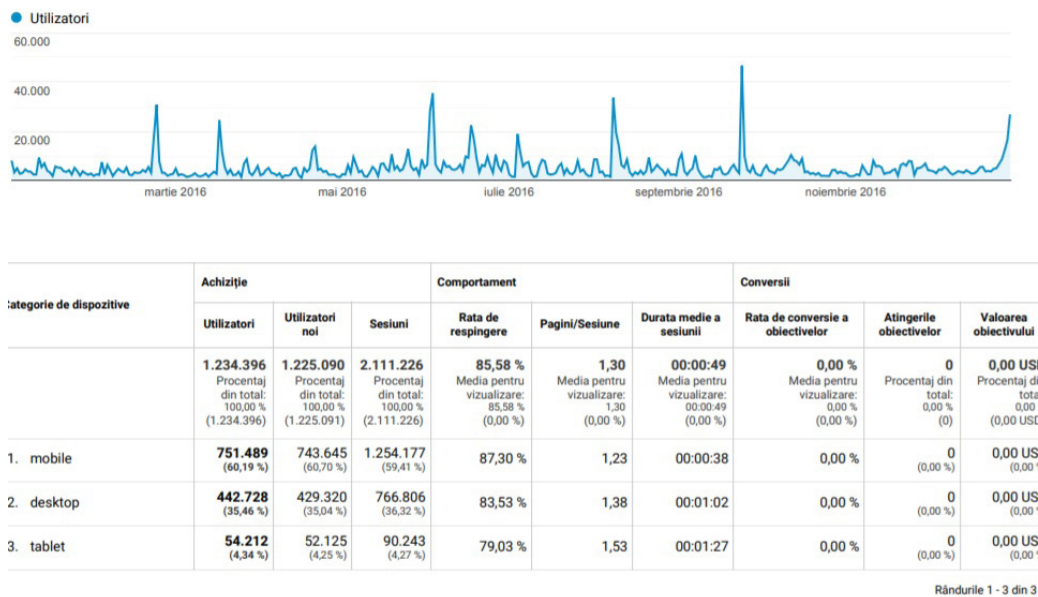


Fig. 3. (Google Analytics Data for radioiasi.ro 2016 – accessing the website / device category criteria)

The trend continued in 2017 (Fig. 4), radioiasi.ro being accessed through mobile devices in

71.47% of cases, whereas the desktop indicator has fallen to 25.70%.

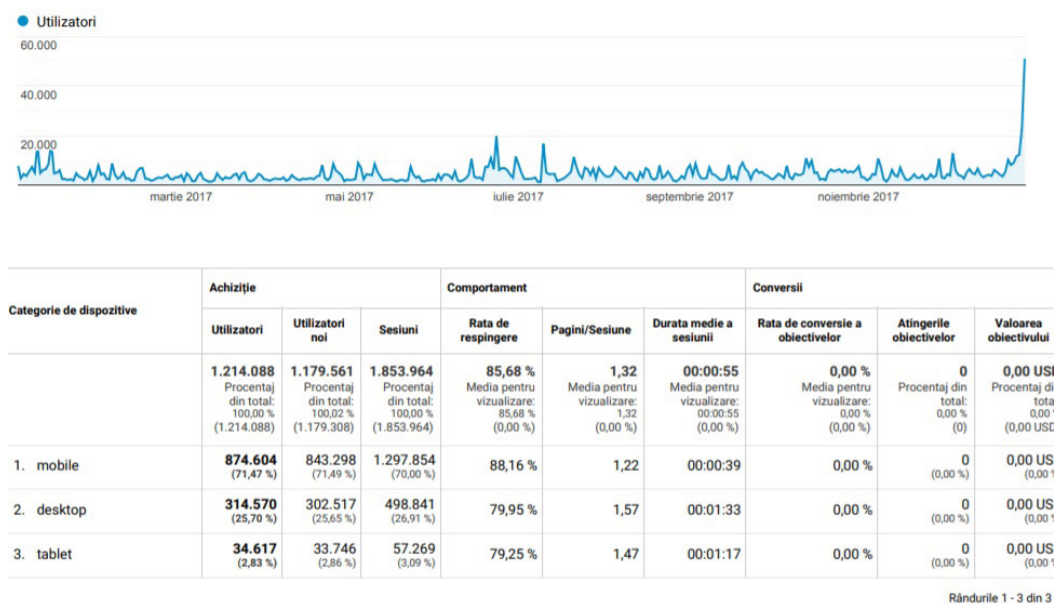


Fig. 4. Google Analytics Data for radioiasi.ro 2017 – accessing the website / device category criteria

In 2018 (Fig. 5), the traffic from mobile devices reached 73.42%, leaving the desktop at 23.99% indicator. During the last 4 years, radioiasi.ro witnessed the online consuming behavior trend

imposed by the search engine new algorithms. Data analysis show that in a 4 year timeframe there is a 24.58% increase in mobile devices access and a decrease of 24.85% in desktop unique visitors.

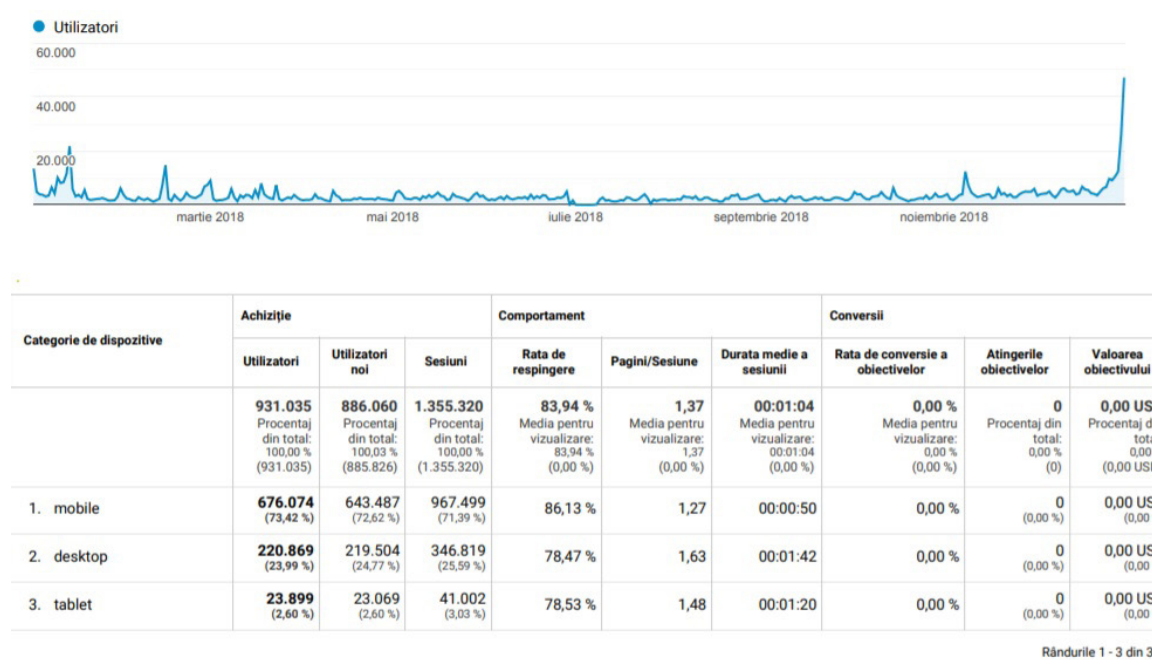


Fig. 5. Google Analytics Data for radioiasi.ro 2018 – accessing the website / device category criteria

3. CONCLUSIONS

Prioritizing content based on mobile responsiveness in favor of traditional desktop interface had an important impact on user behavior when it comes to access online platforms. Online radio broadcasting made it possible not only for traditional stations to distribute their content on a new platform, but also cleared a path for new editorial challenges that helped the emergence of journalistic products in the same manner. Converged online journalism has the advantage of blending the specificity of each communication channel so the radio broadcaster, in our case, produces text, sound and image simultaneously.

Google's mobile-first strategy encompassed in its class leading search engine results impelled media websites to consider responsiveness a default standard for their online themes. In essence, websites without responsiveness characteristics are still ranked in the Google search, but the current algorithm boosts companies with mobile-friendly platforms. Radio România Iași's official website – www.radioiasi.ro – followed the same path. Its WordPress theme has met Google's responsiveness indicators until now and the online product that

Radio România Iași delivers has a variety of uses. Still, the online platform of the regional public radio continues to adapt to tablet and mobile-screen content, offering additional browsing possibilities for these particular gadgets, in a responsive design manner, in order to synchronize with each gadget's available screen view.

Data collected from radioiasi.ro associated Google Analytics account showed a massive increase in mobile device access, rising with almost 25% in four years' time, the user behavior being in favor of mobile devices in 73.42% of the cases as it shows on the latest 2018 figures.

This follows the general tendency mentioned in a Statistics data, that underline the fact that as the computer usage has fallen from 63% in 2014 to 56% (in 2017), while the smartphone usage has risen from 36% (2014) to 60% (2017), making it the number one device in Romania (STATISTA, n.d.).

Responsiveness is an essential characteristic for website and applications in all industries, and it is the largest factor that attracts the sources of traffic. Since the mobile diversity is growing, the challenge of user interfaces to keep improving will be decisive also in this niche of media outlets that offer online content (LOGHIN & STRAMBEANU, 2018).

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