Chapter 7

Communication Technologies in E–Tourism:
A Review of Online Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

Information-intensive and technology-driven environments like e-tourism need to be constantly oriented towards improvement of their communication strategies and infrastructure considering their immediate impact on user experience and customer behavior. The full range of available technologies is rapidly stretching from sophisticated website features to personalized services based on recommender systems that associate user preference with destinations and hospitality services. Despite the development of these technologies, many challenges remain in designing, applying, and evaluating the web-based services in their critical role between visitor and destination experience. This chapter addresses the problem of how to support management decisions on information technology solutions that best promote destination brands, support visitors' decision-making process, and enhance user experience of a place, service, or destination.

INTRODUCTION

Effective use of communication technologies has always been integral to the successful implementation of marketing strategies. Internet and Web technology holds an important role in destination marketing because of the information-intensive nature of the tourism industry. Travelers depend on device mediated content to make a decision;

they cannot directly experience the destination from a distance as production and consumption of the tourism product happen at the same time. The convergence of information technology with the tourism experience leads to a paradigm shift from tourism to smart tourism where new problems, new experiences and new ways of handling destination image emerge (Hunter, Chung, Gretzel, & Koo, 2015). This convergence along with the rapid evolution of the Internet is an influential factor that shapes travelers' behavior (Kenteris, Gavalas, & Economou, 2009).

In this increasingly autonomous ecosystem of decision-making, knowledge management technologies provide software solutions to allow collaboration and sharing of organizational information. Driven by economic, social and technological change, this domain has grown rapidly since the 90s. Tourism and destination marketing can use knowledge systems and data driven information solutions that facilitate information flow, thus improve customer experience and gear value co-creation. Kim et al. (2009) identify user resistance to implementation of information systems due to the 'status quo bias 'and the switching costs that affect perceived value. This resistance may feed an unfriendly knowledge adoption environment sustained by weak links between research and the tourism industry. The chapter's objective is to fill in this gap with insights that promote understanding and propose user-friendly, technology-based solutions.

Websites are the "hubs" where product, service and company information is shared with the public. It is therefore imperative that their effectiveness in transmitting messages and delivering information is measured and evaluated. A great marketing strategy may never reach its full potential without appropriate performance evaluation to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the company's website. The chapter addresses this equally critical space with a discussion on established models of website evaluation. The purpose is to enlighten stakeholders on the role and progress of these emerging technologies in the e-tourism environment, and establish a reliable frame of reference for industry specialists.

Only creative and innovative companies will survive the competition by embracing a continuous business process of re-engineering (Buhalis, 1998). This process will ensure that vision, rational organization, commitment and training are aligned to empower destination organizations to capitalize on the unprecedented opportunities emerging through ITs.

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