



Chapter 14

Designing DMO Communication Strategies Through the Use of a Step-by-Step Model

Vitor Roque

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6027-3340>
Polytechnic of Guarda, Portugal

Rui Raposo

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5275-6200>
University of Aveiro, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the internet, social media, mobile devices, and other equipment with an internet connection play a crucial role in our daily lives and the complex networks of modern society. Destination management organizations (DMO) must regard social media as essential tools for improving their competitiveness through, for instance, engagement to extract and understand customer behaviors and needs. The question is, how may DMO tackle the challenge of bringing social media into their communication plans and strategies? With this challenge in mind, a model was designed and tested to contribute to the DMO's goal of integrating and enhancing the use of social media in their communication and promotion-related activities. The model presented in this chapter is partially the result of two questionnaires. One applied to travelers, and the other was used with DMO and in the observation of the usage of several DMO social media accounts; and a case study was developed in cooperation with a local DMO.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the Internet, social media, mobile devices, and other equipment with an Internet connection, play a crucial role in our daily life and the complex networks of modern society. Everyone uses the Internet for so much more than we can even imagine, from searching necessary information quickly and

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seamlessly to booking a trip or scheduling a medical checkup to an uncountable number of actions that just run continuously in an immense technological background landscape.

With this reality in mind, one might wonder about and question the ever-changing role of social media. If considered to some as a means to help people and businesses connect, for others, these same social networks are an environment for self-expression or even the search for support groups for health-related issues. From a business point of view, these social networks and the widespread use of social media have changed the way that consumers communicate with each other and the way companies interact with their new and long term consumers through their marketing actions (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, & Stephen, 2020). Friedman's theory: "The world is flat", believes that consumers are gaining power in determining the production and distribution of information mostly due to the increasing easiness of access to the Internet (Friedman, 2007) and, in particular social media. These have provided tools and have reviewed continuously the way information is generated and shared among users by empowering users to act both as information producers and consumers (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Chung, Han, & Koo, 2015; Sigala, 2012). At the same time, users have also been invited to contribute online in a collaborative or non-collaborative manner, thus overcoming the traditional time-related and geographical barriers dealt with in a not so distant past (Carvalho & Raposo, 2012). The devices used have also played a center-stage role in the construction of this reality. Mobile devices, such as smartphones, have contributed to the individuals' digital nomadicity by enabling them to connect to the Internet and social networks anywhere and at any time through social media. Despite the pockets of resistance still found in areas such as service coverage, unaffordable data package plans, and poor user experience (UX) design, the technology ecosystem has, in general, tended towards a seamless, technologically embedded, digital nomad prone smart space.

Tourism has, throughout the years, kept in focus on these trends mostly since it is an information-intensive global industry (Buhalis, 2002; O'Connor, 1999; Werthner & Klein, 1999). It is unquestionable that, when using these technologies for travel purposes, they help travelers to connect to information and service providers in each of the different stages of their trips, from pre-trip to post-trip. Social media has become for travelers: (i) authoritative travel-related information sources; (ii) decision-making influencers (Magno & Cassia, 2018; Nujic, Palic, & Herak, 2018) and (iii) interfaces for interaction with service providers (Kwahk & Kim, 2017; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Social media plays an important role in affecting the way consumers search, decide and book and helps consumers in collecting information about products and services, assessing alternatives and making their choices (Gupta, 2019). All the data and information produced and provided by the activity developed on social media may be and, in current practices, is used by the tourism industry, and particularly by the Destination Management Organizations (DMO), to enhance management decision making and consequently increase the competitiveness of the destination (Gretzel, Werthner, Koo, & Lamsfus, 2015; Hunter, Chung, Gretzel, & Koo, 2015; Koo, Gretzel, Hunter, & Chung, 2015). Based on this fact, social media must be regarded by DMO as essential tools for improving their competitiveness through, for instance, engagement to extract and understand customer behaviors and needs (V. Roque & Raposo, 2016), or communicating with entire online communities with interests in specific segments of the tourism market. The question that, therefore, must be put is how may DMO tackle the challenge of bringing social media into their communication plans and strategies. With this challenge in mind, a model was designed and tested to contribute to the DMO's goal of integrating and enhancing the use of social media in their communication and promotion-related activities (Vitor Roque, 2014; Vitor Roque & Raposo, 2017).

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