


Chapter 12

Digital Communication and Dialogism in Official Websites of Tourism Institutions: From Past to Present

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ABSTRACT

In the context of digital transformation, websites play a crucial role in the tourism sector, namely in choosing the tourism destination by tourists or visitors and in the strategic marketing communication of tourism organisations, as well as promoting the attractiveness of destinations. In this chapter, the authors present the results of the observation and analysis of the top 10 official websites of the European countries with the most tourist visits (in 2018) provided by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). This study was based on a set of indicators related to dialogic link and visit repetition dimensions, considering the evolution of the website from 2015 to 2020. The results show that the entities' websites do not have much dialogical capacity and that there are few differences regarding the presence of these indicators between the entities websites between 2015 and 2020.

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, tourism is a source of economic power in many countries, also promoting competition among them to attract visitors and generate revenue. Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) play an important role as they are “responsible for the marketing of an identifiable destination and can operate at a national, state, regional or local level” (Pike, 2012, p. 31). In this way, they contribute to the “tourism marketing and development of the destination” (Wang, 2011, p. 8).

So, in the tourism sector, new media and special social media and the websites are important in the process of choosing a tourist destination by tourists or visitors (Chu et al., 2020), assuming prominence in the strategic marketing communication of tourism organisations and the attractiveness of destinations (Benea, 2014; Hinsona, Osabuteyb & Kosibac, 2018).

Researchers also show that the public has strong exposure to the media, that the public is sensitive to what is transmitted and how it is transmitted in the media context (Jani, Jang, & Hwang, 2011). So, the new media are very important “especially in information search and decision-making behaviours, tourism promotion and in focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers. Leveraging off social media to market tourism products has proven to be an excellent strategy” (Zeng, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, the tourism sector needs to create a close and permanent dialogue with the media world so that the promotion and construction of the destination image are effective. The tourism sector must use the media system to create notoriety and to promote tourist destinations, products, companies or services (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). In this context, the new media provide a set of tools that allow the tourism sector to use new forms of interaction, with a focus on participation and dialogue between organisations and audiences.

So, in this context, the main objective of this work was to study whether the top 10 websites of the official entities of the destination of European countries with more tourist visits (in 2018, according to United Nations World Tourism Organization) adopt the principles of dialogue on their websites, over time. To achieve the objective, it was analysed whether a set of indicators related to the dimensions of dialogical link and repetition of visit were present or absent on the websites of official entities of destination in European countries between 2015 and 2020. In other words, we will understand whether they are open to the sharing and involve the public, whether there are differences between them with regard to the adoption of these principles and whether there has been an evolution in the adoption of these principles, in order to meet the current information needs, conditioning the formation of the online image of a tourist destination.

BACKGROUND

Dialogism and Tourism Websites

Dialogism, defined as sharing experiences and content, interaction between organisations and the public and involvement in a joint production of content, has undergone a strong development with the evolution of the web (Inauen & Schoeneborn, 2014). The development of the web has brought new opportunities for tourists and visitors to seek information (Hinsona, Osabuteyb & Kosibac, 2018), challenges for the communication and interaction of organisations with audiences, with the public, too, wanting to share their experiences (Wong et al., 2020) and a change of functionalist paradigm for a co-creation paradigm in the field of Public Relations. This perspective is based on asymmetrical, bidirectional and dialogic

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