

Dušan Garabinović¹
*Higher business school of vocational studies
“Prof. dr Radomir Bojković” Kruševac*

Slavica Andelić²
Modern Business School Belgrade

Miloš Papić³
*University of Kragujevac,
Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak*

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WEBSITE PROMOTION OF DENTAL INSTITUTIONS: AN EXAMPLE OF SERBIA AS A DENTAL TOURISM DESTINATION

Abstract

Modern means of tourism promotion have become difficult to imagine without the Internet usage. As one of the oldest forms of presentation on the Internet, a website still plays an important role that should not be neglected. In this paper, website is considered as the basis for establishing better promotional activities of the existing dental institutions in health tourism, or dental tourism, to be more specific. Health tourism is one of the potentials for tourism development in the Republic of Serbia, although not exploited in its full potential. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the dental tourism institutions marketing management practice overview in Serbia, indicating the situation in online presence of health institutions highlighted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia. Forty dental institutions were analysed from the point of the official website existence as well as their structural and content characteristics.

Key words: *health tourism, dental tourism, online promotion, website, the Republic of Serbia*

JEL classification: *M31, Z33*

ВЕБ-САЈТ ПРОМОЦИЈА СТОМАТОЛОШКИХ УСТАНОВА: ПРИМЕР СРБИЈЕ КАО ДЕСТИНАЦИЈЕ ДЕНТАЛНОГ ТУРИЗМА

Апстракт

Савремени начини туристичке промоције постали су готово незамисливи без употребе Интернета. Веб-сајт као један од најстаријих видова презентација на Интернету и даље има значајну улогу коју не треба занемарити. Веб-

¹ dusan.garabinovic.032@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0002-6247-3060

² slavicaandjel@gmail.com, ORCID 0000-0003-4021-0822

³ milos.papic@ftn.kg.ac.rs, ORCID 0000-0001-7628-3439

сајт се у овом раду посматра као основ за остваривање бољих промотивних активности постојећих стоматолошких установа које се баве здравственим туризмом, тј. прецизније денталним туризмом. Здравствени туризам је један од потенцијала за развој туризма у Републици Србији, али тај потенцијал тренутно није у довољној мери искоришћен. Циљ овог рада је да доприносе прегледу праксе маркетинг менаџмента установа денталног туризма у Србији кроз указивање на стање онлајн присутности здравствених установа које су истакнуте од стране Министарства здравља Републике Србије. Четрдесет стоматолошких установа је анализирано са становишта постојања званичног веб-сајта као и структурних и садржајних карактеристика веб-сајта.

Кључне речи: здравствени туризам, дентални туризам, онлајн промоција, веб-сајт, Република Србија

Introduction

The medical form of tourism records a growing tendency, and this is confirmed by the transparent papers on the subject. Habibi et al (2021) established the fact that the papers on medical tourism recorded a considerable increase from 2006 to 2015. According to Zhong et al (2021), the increase in the number of papers on medical, health and wellness tourism has become relevant especially since 2010 (74.9 % of all the papers were published from 2010 to 2020).

The Ministry of Health and the National Tourism Organisation of Serbia emphasises dental services, plastic and reconstructive surgery within the field of health tourism (the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, n.d.c; Pavlović, Ikić, 2018). Many authors perceive dental tourism as one of the most interesting areas in medical tourism in Serbia (Spasojević, Šušić, 2011; Milicevic et al., 2013; Mihailović et al., 2016; Ignjatijević & Čavlin, 2016; Dašić, 2018; Ljubisavljević & Živanović, 2019). On the other hand, medical tourism marketing, dental tourism included, is not at a very high level (Ignjatijević & Čavlin, 2016; Ljubisavljević & Živanović, 2019).

“The development of digital technologies has fundamentally changed all segments of the functioning of human societies and ways of doing business in all activities” (Krivokuća et al. 2021). They also “provide better opportunities for businesses to establish distinctive strategic positioning” (Angeloska-Dichovska & Petkovska Mirchevska, 2017). The significance of the Internet in promotional activities of health institutions is obvious, based on the fact that 36% of foreign citizens using medical services in Serbia stated Internet as the source of information when deciding on health services usage in Serbia (Ignjatijević et al., 2017).

So far, no paper has been found referring to the analysis of online promotional activities in dental institutions from the territory of the Republic of Serbia, nor the dental tourism websites. Thus, the subject of this paper is the analysis of dental institutions websites in the Republic of Serbia dealing with dental tourism. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the marketing management practice overview in dental tourism institutions in Serbia, pointing out the situation in online presence of medical institutions highlighted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia (n.d.a). The following tasks ensue from this aim: (1) establishing the

existence of the official websites in the institutions analysed and (2) establishing structural and content characteristics of the existing websites in the analysed institutions. The significance of this paper ensues from the first overview of website characteristics in the dental tourism institutions in the Republic of Serbia.

Research methodology

The criteria for dental tourism institutions website evaluation in the Republic of Serbia have been determined as follows. First, the criteria used in the papers by Martinovic et al. (2010), Poorterman et al. (2014), Constantin & Kavoura (2016), Jurišić (2018), Chongthanavanit & Kheokao (2019) (based on Moghavvemi et al. (2017), which is based on Maifredi et al. (2010)), Kopmaz et al. (2019) (based on Mira et al. (2006) and Llinás et al. (2008)) and Constantin & Kavoura (2019) were selected, as well as the items from the “Code of ethics for dentists for electronic commerce in the EU” (Council of European Dentists, 2017). Since we speak of a large number of criteria, the selection of the most suitable ones followed (in the authors’ opinions), as well as their modification with the aim of preparing as suitable evaluation of websites as possible. In accordance with the topic of this paper, the importance of health (including dental) tourism is especially emphasized. The total of 70 criteria was selected, grouped into 12 categories to provide transparency (Tables 1-12).

The website analysis was conducted in August 2021. The evaluation of the presence of the chosen criteria was conducted in the selection of one of the evaluation possibilities – Exists / Yes, Does Not Exist / No. This method was frequently used in the above stated papers. Each author evaluated the websites individually, so that the authors’ evaluation of each criterion and website was compared afterwards in order to perform a joint check and decide on the final evaluation in case of disparity. The same principle of website evaluation was applied in case of Čuruvija et al. (2021), with the aim of obtaining the most accurate results.

The sample for dental tourism institutions was established in three steps. The first one implies establishing the preliminary list of dental tourism institutions on the basis of the information available on the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia website (n.d.a) (44 institutions). The second one refers to the accurate identification of the dental tourism institutions according to the information available on the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia website, data search of the Serbian Business Registers Agency (n.d.) and the Internet. It also includes establishing the status of business active institutions (42 institutions). The third step implies establishing identified business active institutions in dental tourism with active/functional websites (40 institutions).

When it comes to step 3, it is necessary to highlight that there was no attempt at establishing other potential (alternative) dental institutions websites (other than the ones listed by the Ministry). The reason is that a list of dental tourism institutions already exists on the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia website as a form of joint promotion. According to the data of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, 40 out of 44 institutions met the required conditions (90.91%). We need to highlight once again that one of the general requirements for involvement with the development of dental tourism programme is “the existence of the appropriate website presentation

according to the regulations governing health advertising” (the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, n.d.b). These information point to the conclusion that the Ministry of Health website in dental tourism should be updated (accurate name, functional website address), as well as completed with additional data (such as the address of the institution).

Research results and Discussion

Table 1 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to general information in a dental institution. “General information on a dental institution” realisation of five criteria (62.50%) is present in over a half of the website in the analysis. The name of the dental institution is the only one present in all the websites. The average criteria representation percentage is 68.43%. It is obvious that logo is much more present than slogan – with the worst position among the criteria.

Table 1: General information on a dental institution

Criteria	No.	%
Name of the dental institution	40	100.00
Dental specialties (areas of excellence) and number of dental offices / separated wards (if any)	39	97.50
Presence of logo	38	95.00
History of the dental office (eg year of construction)	32	80.00
Working hours	29	72.50
Licenses and information about registration with address and other contact details of competent authorities or links to their websites; including the existence of a certificates relating to the practice,	16	40.00
Statement of purpose (mission and/or vision of the dental institution)	14	35.00
Presence of slogan	11	27.50

Source: the authors' research

Table 2 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to health tourism (dental tourism included). It is interesting that less than a half of the analysed subjects provide information on health or dental tourism on their websites, although these dental institutions possess the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia certificate, therefore they are included in the health tourism development programme in Serbia. The recommendation would be to include this type of information in the website content (separate section would be the best) because they provide the information to potential patients-tourists, and reflect true commitment to tourism, promoting tourist destination as well as other factors in tourist offer.

Table 2: Health tourism (dental tourism included)

Criteria	No.	%
Health tourism (dental tourism included)	19	47.50

Source: the authors' research

Table 3 provides criteria realisation related to the rules governing dental practice. All four criteria related to the rules governing dental practice are met in a very low percentage of the analysed websites. This is best reflected in the information that the average criteria representation is only 6.90%, while the presence of one of the criteria (manner of filing a complaint) is noticed in none of the websites. As we can see, not even *COVID-19* pandemics (in terms of protection measures) could affect the increase in information and regulation presence necessary to observe during patient admission, treatment and discharge, as well as those related to the person accompanying the patient.

Table 3: The rules governing dental practice

Criteria	No.	%
Information and rules to be followed when admitting a patient, dental intervention and discharging patient, as well as the information and rules to be followed by people which are accompanied by the patient, visiting the patient etc.	5	12.50
Patient privacy information	4	10.00
The professional rules governing dental practice or address and other contact details of competent authorities dealing with the above rules	2	5.00
Manner of filing a complaint	0	0.00

Source: the authors' research

Table 4 shows an overview of criteria realisation related to the information on services. The criteria related to the information on services are present on most websites to a large extent. This is supported by the fact that 3 out of 4 criteria (75%) are present on most of the analysed websites, and the average criteria representation percent is 70.62%.

If we compare the presence of pictures and video materials on dental and other services, we can observe that pictures are mainly present. The videos matching the descriptions could be observed in about a quarter of the analysed websites. For example, in case of two websites there are pictures before and after the treatment, where you can compare the tooth by moving the cursor.

The suggestion in this case is that dental institutions should add some information about whether they provide services for patients even after the working hours. The information could be presented as a note (for example, within the information on working hours), or a specific type of services (so called emergencies).

Table 4: Information on services

Criteria	No.	%
List of dental and/or other treatments / services	39	97.50
Description of dental and/or other treatments (materials, equipment...)	35	87.50
Image (photo/video) of dental and/or other treatments (before-after)	28	70.00
Information services available outside opening hours (emergency)	11	27.50

Source: the authors' research

Table 5 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to the information about prices and method of payment. None of the three criteria related to the information about the prices and method of payment is present in most of the analysed websites. It is interesting that the realisation of these criteria is almost balanced, with the average realisation of 42.50%. We should also emphasise that the existence of the information about the cooperation with certain insurance companies is especially important for foreign citizens, as well as the possibilities of refunds afterwards.

When it comes to price list availability, we should emphasise that three interesting cases were noticed (not included in the previous table). One of the cases asked for an email in order to receive pro forma invoice. In the other case, it was necessary to fill in the form for price list download. Both of these cases are examples of non-transparent price list display. The third case provided the price list only for education area (eg courses, study visit, etc), but not for dental services.

Another aspect of price list observation is the currency (note – one website could provide multilingual options). Most of the cases offer the price list in euros (9), less often in dinars (4). In cases of two websites the prices are in both euros and dinars. It is interesting that in one of the websites the prices are in euros and points, while in the other one they are in dinars and points, and it may be rather confusing.

Table 5: Information about prices and method of payment

Criteria	No.	%
Information about guarantees and insurance policies	18	45.00
Availability of price list on website	17	42.50
Information about payment options are available (cash, credit cards...)	16	40.00

Source: the authors' research

Table 6 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to the information about location and accessibility. Most criteria (75%) related to the information about location and accessibility are not present in majority of the analysed websites. The information about address is available on all websites, integrated maps are highly represented leading to a higher average of criteria representation in percentages (43.44%), higher than it would be without these two items. The information about how to reach the practice, possibility of reaching a dental institution through cooperation with travel agents or hotels, pictures/videos, location description as well the information about car parks are the information particularly important for foreign tourists – there is a lack of the aforementioned information. For example, the reason for the absence of the information about possible cooperation with travel agents and hotels could be no cooperation, as well as no promotion of the existing cooperation on the website.

Comparing the existing pictures and videos/virtual tours, we reach the conclusion that there are only pictures on most websites (7), only videos/virtual tours (3) or both pictures and videos/virtual tours (3) on a few websites.

Table 6: The information about location and accessibility

Criteria	No.	%
The address of the practice is available	40	100.00
Presence of integrated maps (eg GoogleMaps)	38	95.00
Description how to reach dental institution (eg mode of transport)	14	35.00
Possibilities of getting to the dental institution in cooperation / partnership with travel agents or hotels	14	35.00
Images (photo/video) of the location and position of the dental institution, the institution surroundings etc.	13	32.50
Textual description of the location	12	30.00
Information about parking possibilities on the site	6	15.00
Information about persons with disabilities (eg. wheelchair accessibility)	2	5.00

Source: the authors' research

Table 7 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to the information about the physical environment inside a dental institution. Only two of the criteria related to the information about physical environment inside a dental institution are realised on more than a half of the websites, while one of the criteria (textual description of the admission/reception area) is not represented in any of the websites. The average criteria representation in the aforementioned category is 45.50%.

It is interesting that practice/admission/reception area pictures and videos criteria are much more present on most websites, rather than the criteria related to textual descriptions. Most of the websites (23) contain only pictures, out of the total number with available images of admission/reception area (30). There are a few with a combination of pictures and videos (5). The least present are videos/virtual tours (2). In the total of websites with dental practice images available (36), most contain only pictures (27), while a small number contain a combination of pictures and videos/virtual tours.

Table 7: The information about the physical environment inside a dental institution

Criteria	No.	%
Image (photo/video) of the dental office	36	90.00
Image (photo/video) of the admission/reception area	30	75.00
General overview of facilities	16	40.00
General overview (virtual tour / video)	9	22.50
Textual description of the admission/reception area	0	0.00

Source: the authors' research

Table 8 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to the information about staff. The criteria included in the category of information about staff are significantly present on the analysed websites (4 criteria, ie, 57.14% present on most of the websites). The average representation is 58.57%. The list of staff is in a high position, as well as the criteria related to the dentists employed (except foreign languages and licence

information). The lists of staff are better positioned compared to the staff photos, indicating that dental institutions pay more attention to the textual descriptions. Poor representation of information about languages staff use in communication with patients (possibility of interpreter included) is a disadvantage for foreign tourists who cannot speak Serbian well, and makes it difficult for them to choose the appropriate practice. On the other hand, since dentists are people with higher education, we can assume that they should master the basics of at least one foreign language.

Table 8: The information on staff

Criteria	No.	%
List of staff (dentists)	37	92.50
Qualification(s) / professional titles / information about trainings / programs completed by each dentist	33	82.50
List of other staff (job description)	28	70.00
Photo of the employee (dentists)	27	67.50
Photo of other employees	20	50.00
Languages staff use in communication with patients (and/or possibility of interpreter included)	12	30.00
Licenses and information about registration of dentists with address and other contact details of competent authorities or links to their websites; including the existence of a certificates relating to the dentists	7	17.50

Source: the authors' research

Table 9 provides an overview of criteria realisation related to the information on contact and interaction possibility.

Table 9: Information on contact and interaction possibility

Criteria	No.	%
Phone number / fax	40	100.00
E-mail address	37	92.50
Possibility to contact the dental institution via the website (QA option)	30	75.00
Links to online forums for patient feedback, social networks, blogs etc.	29	72.50
Online appointment system is available (examination / therapy / consultation)	21	52.50
FAQ (frequently asked questions)	17	42.50
Possibility to write comments / reviews / testimonials and guestbooks	6	15.00
Possibility to add files on the contact	6	15.00
Possibility to subscribe to the newsletter	5	12.50

Source: the authors' research

Most of the criteria in the category information on contact and interaction possibility are present on most of the analysed websites (55.56%), and therefore the average criteria representation percentage is 53.06%. It is clear from the available data that dental practices are mainly focused on providing the information such as phone number/fax and email addresses.

When it comes to phone number information, it is necessary to emphasise that both landline and mobile numbers are present on most analysed websites (31; 77.50%). Only mobile number is less frequent (4; 10.00%), landline/mobile/fax combination (3; 7.50%), only landline (1; 2.50%) and landline/fax combination (1; 2.50%). It is interesting that Viber and/or WhatsApp is also available (on the website included) in case of 7 websites (17.50%). There are certain cases where more than one landline and/or mobile phone number is offered, as well as agent/manager number abroad.

When it comes to email addresses, most websites contain professional/official email address (18; 45.00% of websites, ie, 48.65% of websites containing the information on email addresses). Sixteen websites contain general email address (40.00% of websites, ie, 43.24% of the websites containing the information on email address), while in case of 3 websites both professional and general email address is provided (7.50% of websites, ie, 8.11% of websites containing the information on email address). Among the general/unofficial/unprofessional email addresses available, domain @gmail.com is the most frequent (13 websites), followed by @hotmail.com, @hotmail.rs, @open.telekom.rs/@mts.rs, @eunet.rs and @yahoo.com (1 website each). On the basis of the data listed so far, we can reach the conclusion that the information about professional email address is available on a half of the analysed websites, but since its presence is desirable according to Knott (2015), we would suggest further increase in its representation.

When we speak of connections to social networks, most websites include the link to Facebook (28), 18 to Instagram, 12 to You-Tube, 7 to Google+, 7 to LinkedIn, 7 to Twitter. In addition to that, it is necessary to indicate that a link to social networks for doctors are also provided in one of the cases.

Table 10 provides an overview on criteria realisation related to the information on the website and its technical characteristics.

Table 10: The information on the website and its technical characteristics

Criteria	No.	%
Presence of images which improve website design	40	100.00
Live (no broken) links (links point to the specified files)	39	97.50
Text is legible (font size, font type, good contrast with background)	36	90.00
Multilingual website options exist	28	70.00
Website search tool is available	16	40.00
Website map present	12	30.00
Website accessibility for people with sensorial disabilities (eyesight, sense of hearing)	0	0.00
Website creation date	0	0.00
The date of the last update	0	0.00
Smartphone app is available	0	0.00

Source: the authors' research

Less than a half of the criteria is present on most of the analysed websites (40.00%). Four of the criteria (40.00%) is not present on any of the websites, so it affected the average of criteria representation within this category to be 42.75%. All websites contain images, but on 60.00% of websites there are only pictures (slideshow included), while

videos are also present in 40.00% of the websites, in addition to the pictures. No sounds are noticed (except in case of the videos), which is in line with the lack of options for website access for the people with hearing or sight problems.

It is also necessary to emphasise the absence of the latest page update, and it may urge the visitors to question the currency of information provided on the website. The only way to check whether the website is up-to-date is to follow the dates in blog posts or news (if the website contains the elements stated).

When it comes to multilingual websites, 28 of the websites provide the English language option. German language is present on 10 websites, Italian on 7 websites, French on 3 websites, Russian and Hungarian on 2 websites, Slovakian, Greek and Spanish on one website each. We should point out that although the icons for certain languages are provided, they do not work. In some of the websites we can also observe that only a part of the website is translated into the chosen language, not the complete website.

Table 11 provides an overview of the criteria realisation related to the promotional activities.

Table 11: Promotional activities

Criteria	No.	%
Lack of comparison with other same or similar institutions	40	100.00
Promotional materials are available (eg video, brochures etc.)	11	27.50
News about dental institution (eg innovative treatments, equipment, conferences, seminars etc.)	9	22.50
Media reports about dental institution or links to them are available	6	15.00

Source: the authors' research

Most of the criteria related to the promotional activities are absent on most of the analysed websites, which is best indicated by the average realisation percentage of 41.25%. The only criterion present on most of the websites (all websites) is the absence of comparison to other institutions of the same or similar type, such as required according to the “Code of ethics for dentists for electronic commerce in the EU” (Council of European Dentists, 2017). The absence of the media reports on a dental institution could be justified by the fact that no reports exist, but the lack of promotional activities and news about a dental institution (generated by the institution) is extremely unjustified.

Table 12 provides an overview of the criteria realisation related to the cooperation with other institutions.

Table 12: Cooperation with other institutions

Criteria	No.	%
Links to suppliers (eg materials, equipment etc.)	10	25.00
Links to transport service providers	10	25.00
Links to hotels, restaurants, entertainment etc. in the destination	8	20.00
Links to relevant agencies / tourist attractions	5	12.50
Links to professional associations and relevant institutions	2	5.00
Links to other health / medical / scientific institutions	2	5.00

Source: the authors' research

The criteria for cooperation with other institutions are present on a small number of the analysed websites. This is best illustrated by the fact that maximum representation of a criteria is 25.00%, average criteria representation percentage is 15.42%. Tourism is a very complex business activity which involves various services, inevitably those related to accommodation, food/drinks and transport. If dental institutions desire to provide the experience of true dental tourism it is necessary to: 1) establish the cooperation with the corresponding institutions; 2) highlight (promote) the cooperation with those institutions; 3) enable the connections among partner institutions websites.

Of the total number of criteria, 26 (37.14%) are present on more than a half of the analysed websites, while only 1 criterion is present on half of the websites. Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that most of the criteria (61.43%) are present on less than a half of the analysed websites. To be more specific, most of the criteria (6; ie 8.57%) are not present on any of the websites, while 5 criteria (5; ie 7.14%) are present on all of the websites.

Conclusion

The Republic of Serbia has a potential for dental tourism development, but promotional activity improvement is necessary. First, it is necessary to update the segment of the Ministry of Health website related to the list of dental institutions within health tourism in terms of stating only the active institutions, their accurate business names and active website addresses. The data about the institutions should preferably be added (eg address). Dental institutions without websites should start using one. When it comes to website content, information on services, general information on a dental institution, information on staff, contact and interaction possibilities - they are all represented on most of the dental tourism institutions websites in the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, 75% of the analysed categories are present on less than a half of the analysed websites. Only 7.14% of the criteria is present in all websites, while 8.57% of the criteria is present on none of the websites. The missing criteria should be included on the website, while the existing ones should be completed.

The significance of this paper is in the first analysis of online promotion of dental tourism institutions in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. A combination of various criteria in the dental tourism website analysis defined by other authors is also significant. The disadvantages of this research are the sample of the dental institutions highlighted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the choice of the relevant criteria according to the author's opinion (due to a large number of criteria). The directions of the further research should be towards expanding the analysis sample in the Republic of Serbia, conducting the analysis in other countries in order to compare the results obtained, as well as establishing the significance of certain categories and criteria within, based on the dental tourists' opinions.

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