

Traditional vs. digital: A framework for tourism destination marketing planning process

Tradicionalno naspram digitalnog: planski okvir procesa planiranja marketing aktivnosti turističkih destinacija

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Abstract

Tourism destinations represent a central element of research in tourism, given that the majority of the tourist activities take place in them. Accordingly, this paper is aimed at highlighting the importance of adequate strategic management of tourism destinations, as well as the key role of strategic marketing management of tourism destinations. This paper presents the review of literature devoted to the stages of the tourism destination marketing planning process, as well as the literature devoted to the differences between traditional and digital marketing planning process in all sectors, without directly focusing on tourism. Accordingly, the contribution of this paper lies in connecting the two subjects and proposing the framework for tourism destinations digital marketing planning process.

Keywords: digital marketing, strategic marketing management, tourism destinations, framework

Sažetak

Turističke destinacije predstavljaju centralni element istraživanja u turizmu s obzirom da se najveći deo turističkih aktivnosti odvija upravo u njima. Iz tog razloga, ovaj rad je usmeren ka isticanju važnosti adekvatnog strategijskog upravljanja turističkom destinacijom, kao i ključnoj ulozi strategijskog upravljanja marketingom turističkih destinacija. U radu je predstavljen pregled literature posvećen fazama procesa planiranja marketing aktivnosti turističkih destinacija, kao i literature posvećene razlikama između planiranja tradicionalnih i digitalnih marketing aktivnosti u svim sektorima, bez fokusa na turizmu. U skladu sa tim, doprinos ovog rada je u povezivanju ove dve teme i predstavljanju planskog okvira procesa planiranja digitalnih marketing aktivnosti turističkih destinacija.

Ključne reči: digitalni marketing, strategijsko upravljanje marketingom, turističke destinacije, planski okvir

1. Introduction


Tourist activities predominantly take place within tourism destinations; therefore, a tourism destination is the key element of all tourism system models (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Leiper, 2004, p. 52; Popesku, 2016, p. 30) and appears as a basic unit of analysis in tourism (Baggio, et al., 2010; Pike & Page, 2014; Źemła, 2016; Pike, 2012, p. 2). Marketing activities carried out at the level of a tourism destination have the task of supporting the most important elements of the destination such as attractions, all the available services and facilities, as well as the human resources of the destination, by creating an attractive image of the destination, shaping instruments

that support that image and promoting the image to the target market. Within that process, destination marketing organizations (DMO) should play a key role (Komppula, 2014). These non-profit organizations are responsible for developing and implementing the marketing strategy of the destination, as well as promoting the economic development of the destination (Molina, et al., 2020). In addition, these organizations are mainly responsible for developing a unique destination image and providing information to visitors (Deng & Liu, 2021; Gretzel, et al., 2006; Prideaux & Cooper, 2003; Yang & Wang, 2015).

Destination marketing organizations perform their activities and achieve their business goals in a highly

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turbulent and competitive environment (Altin, et al., 2018; Rate, et al., 2018, p. 1), which is characterized by rapid changes and a strong interconnection between the actions of the company and the reactions of other organizations operating in the environment (Popescu, 2018, p. 123). In the past few decades, the world has experienced a large number of changes that have had a huge impact on the tourism sector (Sotiriadis, 2021), including the global acceptance of the importance of sustainability, huge changes in the way people are informed, globalization, disintermediation, online distribution and comprehensive application of information technologies, to name a few (Pike & Page, 2014).

All these changes have also affected destination marketing organizations and coerced them to find new ways of responding to the changes flexibly and efficiently. Continuously growing fierce competition among tourism destinations (Campos, et al., 2018; Jiang, et al., 2016; Mariani, 2020; Mariani, et al., 2014; Molina, et al., 2020) has indicated the necessity of reviewing the old ways of managing destinations and introducing new integrated and professional approaches to the management and development of the tourism destination (Van Niekerk, 2017). As there is a constant struggle for obtaining a competitive advantage in the tourism market in order to gain the trust of tourists (Čerović, 2020, p. 112), DMOs must continuously find new and innovative ways of establishing an active relationship with the target market (González-Rodríguez, et al., 2016; Marasco, et al., 2018). Adapting to changes in the environment is necessary in order to achieve business goals (Vellas, 2016, p. 36), hence DMOs must coordinate operational and strategic management, that is, the pursuit of stability and the need to react to the changes in the environment (Popescu, 2016, p. 158).

Besides understanding previous and current business environment trends, contemporary strategic management requires the ability to predict future changes as well (Rate, et al., 2018, p. 2). Consequently, this process can be considered the most important process of any public sector organization (Evans, 2015, p. 12). Tourism destinations strive to achieve the largest possible market share (Dwyer, et al., 2016), as well as numerous economic advantages that accompany the increased number of tourists (Fyall, 2019). This can be accomplished by adequate strategic management of the tourism destination, which enables achieving balance between the destination and its ever-changing environment (Marais, et al., 2017). Within that process, strategic marketing management of the tourism destination has a very important role. This process includes the adoption of appropriate approaches and the use of adequate tools and techniques by destination marketing organizations for the purposes of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of destination marketing activities (Soteriades, 2012).

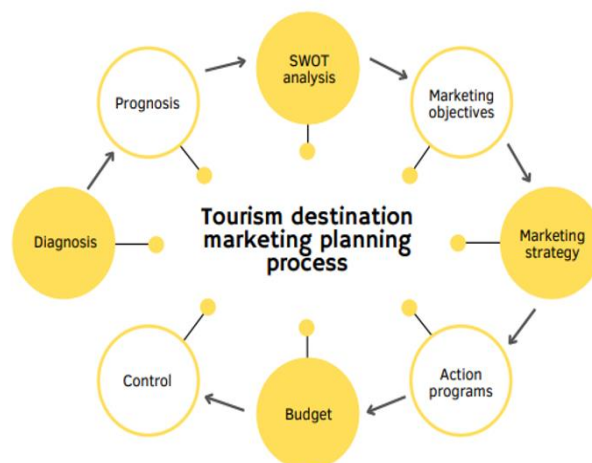
American Marketing Association (AMA, 2022) defines marketing management as “the process of setting marketing goals for an organization (considering internal resources and market opportunities), the planning and execution of activities to meet these goals and measuring

progress toward their achievement”. In addition, this organization adds that the process should be ongoing and repetitive so that the organization can constantly adapt to internal and external changes that create new problems and opportunities. Marketing management of tourism destinations is recognized as the key element of the future development of tourism destinations (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019), and as such has become a central element of tourism research (Fyall, et al., 2012). Within the tourism destination marketing management process, the first step is the marketing planning process, followed by research, implementation, control and evaluation (Morrison, 2013, p. 78; Avraham & Ketter, 2017).

2. Tourism destination marketing planning process

Marketing planning process is a useful process by which an organization develops its strategies that are adapted to itself and its environment (McDonald, 2016). It is a process aimed at increasing the internal strengths and overall performance of the organization (Ayub, et al., 2013). Tourism destination marketing planning process usually consists of the following stages (Middleton, et al., 2009, p. 207; Popescu & Gajić, 2020, p. 151) which are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Stages in the tourism destination marketing planning process



Source: Adapted from Middleton, V. T., Fyall, A., Morgan, M., & Ranchhod, A. (2009). *Marketing in travel and tourism*. Routledge, p 207; Popescu, J., & Gajić, J. (2020). *Marketing u turizmu i hotelijerstvu*. Singidunum University, Belgrade, p.151.

Diagnosis, or situational analysis, involves determining all the factors that have influenced the current position of the tourism destination (Popescu, 2016, p. 159). The diagnosis includes the analysis of the micro and macro environment (Dudley, et al., 2021), the internal analysis of the tourism destination resources, as well as the analysis of competitors (Ratten, 2016).

Prognosis, that is, prediction of the direction of the tourism destination based on data obtained through situational analysis. An important part of the tourism destination prognosis process is a precise forecast of tourism demand, which favorably affects the development

of the long-term marketing strategy, as well as the tourism development strategy (Dergiades, et al., 2018; Li, et al., 2020; Volchek, et al., 2019; Wu, et al., 2017). As the tourism market is characterized by frequent changes, the purpose of prognosis is not complete prediction accuracy, but careful and continuous assessment of opportunities with a focus on future choices (Middleton, et al., 2009, p. 209). The process of strategic prognosis is not a direct prediction of the future, but a better understanding of the future in relation to competitors (Duus, 2016).

SWOT analysis is the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and provides information necessary for making further strategic decisions. It is a useful tool for identifying adequate future management strategies (Navarro-Martínez, et al., 2020; Reihanian, et al., 2012), which provides a basis for developing strategies (Ajmera, 2017).

The objectives of marketing activities are determined based on the data obtained by analyzing the opportunities and threats from the environment and determining the internal weaknesses and strengths of the tourism destination. Successfully formulated objectives must be realistic and consistent, hierarchically arranged and expressed quantitatively. In addition, the plan for objectives' fulfillment must be an integral part of this stage of the marketing planning process (Kolb, 2017, p. 96). The objectives of marketing activities of a tourism destination can be, for example, changing the long-term negative image of the destination, increasing interest in an unknown destination, changing the characteristics of the destination, or reducing the number of visitors, to name a few (Avraham & Ketter, 2016).

Developing a marketing strategy implies defining the best ways to achieve the objectives established during the previous stage and is a central element of the marketing planning process (Morgan, et al., 2019). Marketing strategy leads the organization in the chosen direction towards the established objectives (Vellas, 2016, p. 29) and describes the way in which the defined objectives of marketing activities can be achieved (Kotler, 2012, p. 47). The main reason for developing the marketing strategy of a tourism destination is to increase the motivation of tourists and their willingness to purchase products and services available in the destination. In addition, the effective use of the tourism destination marketing strategy leads to the creation and improvement of brand value (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Liu & Chou, 2016; Pike, 2005), as well as to the further development of services and products available to visitors in the destination, all in order to satisfy their increasingly high expectations.

Defining the action programs, or in other words, determining the tactics, implies establishing specific activities that must be undertaken in order to enable the successful management of a tourism destination. Well defined and adequately implemented action programs can motivate tourists to visit a tourism destination (McDowall & Ma, 2010) and thus ensure the strengthening of its competitive position (Kukartsev, et al., 2019).

Determining the budget, that is, planning the costs and income, implies a quantitative expression of the defined action programs (Horngren, et al., 2006, p. 181; Uyar & Bilgin, 2011), as well as the distribution of financial resources to organizational units that are responsible for implementing the action programs (Steiss, 2019, p. iii).

Control of the entire marketing plan is essential after the objectives of marketing activities and the budget necessary for their realization are clearly defined, as well as the time period in which their realization is desirable. The more precisely the objectives of a tourism destination are determined, the greater the possibility of adequate control.

3. Digital marketing planning process

Literature review indicated that numerous authors believe that the digital marketing planning process should be based on well-known and established principles of traditional marketing planning process, emphasizing the fact that it is necessary to adapt certain steps to the online sphere. Accordingly, authors Chaffey and Smith (2017, p. 4), Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016, p. 40) and Kingsnorth (2019, p. 75-82) provide frameworks for the digital marketing planning process, which are based on already established stages of the traditional marketing planning process, with additional elements specific to the digital sphere:

- Situational analysis - answers the question about the position of the company or organization at a given moment and includes the analysis of the micro and macro environment, as well as a special SWOT analysis of the company or organization in the online environment, and determines good and bad examples of digital marketing application in the field.
- Objectives - define the future position the company or organization wants to be in, but additionally include the vision of using digital channels, as well as specific numerical objectives the use of digital channels should provide, such as the projection of sales volume, cost savings and conversion.
- Strategy – represents the way to achieve the desired position. Equally to developing traditional marketing strategy, it involves segmentation, targeting, positioning and establishing the combination of marketing instruments, all with the help of numerous digital tools, as well as the selection of adequate digital channels.
- Tactics – implies the selection of individual digital tools to be used in order to implement the strategy.
- Actions – defining the action plans necessary for the implementation of the digital strategy.
- Control – the way of monitoring the strategy implementation process through digital channels. It involves the use of web analytics to assess whether strategic and tactical goals have been achieved and how improvements can be made to achieve even better results.

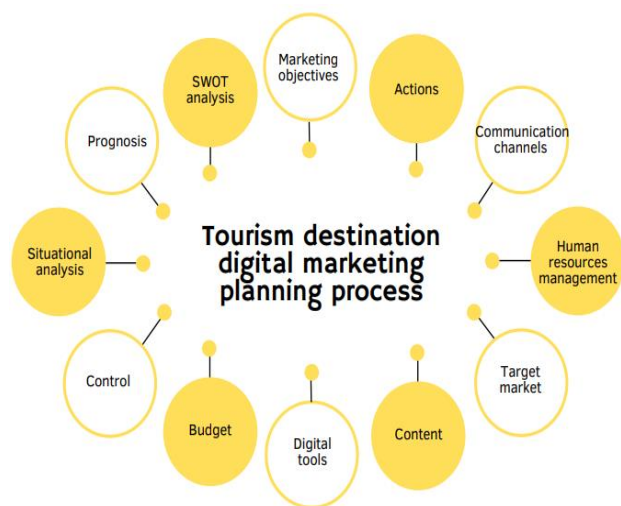
Following slightly different approach, author Hamill (2016, p. 432) applies a well-known strategic planning framework known as the balanced scorecard to the

process of digital marketing planning. Accordingly, this author suggests the following stages of the digital marketing planning process: vision of digital marketing activities, objectives to be achieved with digital marketing activities, users that the organization can reach digitally, specific digital actions that should be taken in order to meet the previously established objectives, and decisions made in the field of organizational resources related to digital marketing activities.

4. Framework for tourism destination digital marketing planning process

The aforementioned frameworks for digital marketing planning process are not directly associated with tourism, and especially not to destination marketing organizations in charge of tourism destination marketing planning. Each of the described frameworks contains of a large number of elements, not all of which are equally important for the process of planning digital marketing activities of tourism destinations. Within this frame of reference, and in accordance with previously described stages of tourism destination marketing planning process, this paper offers the following framework for tourism destination digital marketing planning process presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Framework for tourism destination digital marketing planning process



Source: Author

Situational analysis - the ultimate goal of the implementation of tourism destination marketing activities is to increase the number of visitors to the destination. As a result, before starting to engage in digital marketing activities, it is necessary to determine the exact number of arrivals and overnight stays in the destination. In addition, considering that a large number of destination marketing organizations have already created official websites, as well as social media accounts dedicated to the destination, it is necessary to determine their current performance, such as the number of visitors and followers. These data will be used later in the process in order to give insight into the achieved results.

Prognosis – based on the data obtained from the situational analysis, it is necessary to determine the direction of the tourism destination, as well as to assess

the current and future needs of the tourism demand. Additionally, the question of where digital marketing should lead the destination should also be answered within this stage. Furthermore, future digital trends should also be taken into account and predicted as well as possible.

SWOT analysis - within the process of the tourism destination digital marketing planning, the results of the SWOT analysis will primarily be used to determine the strongest assets of the destination, which will occupy a central place in the future marketing activities of the destination.

Setting marketing objectives – this stage of the tourism destination digital marketing planning should consist of several steps. First of all, the desired (but possible) percentage increase in the number of visitors to the tourism destination should be determined. Secondly, the key objectives to be achieved with digital marketing activities should be acknowledged, taking into account that they must be consistent with the overall objectives of the destination. Following that, it is necessary to set digital objectives such as increasing the number of followers, conversion rate, interaction rate, to name a few. Finally, key performance indicators which will be used to measure the achieved results should be specified.

Actions – this stage implies establishing the exact actions which must be undertaken in order to meet the previously established marketing objectives. In addition, during this stage it can be determined whether there is a generic digital marketing strategy that can be followed to achieve the desired results. After determining the overall actions, it is possible to define actions for each separate digital marketing channel. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the key parameters for measuring success, the goal which is being pursued and what steps are necessary to fulfill that goal for each individual digital channel that will be used.

Selection of communication channels - the number of channels available for engaging in digital marketing activities is becoming larger and larger over time. However, the success of digital marketing activities implementation does not lie in using all the available channels, but lies exclusively in the quality of the content provided. As a result, it is necessary to determine the exact digital platforms the tourism destination will be represented on, the number of accounts, the frequency of posting on social media, and the frequency of updating the official website, to name a few. Following this, continuous involvement and work on further improvement of digital marketing activities is necessary.

Human resources management - implies a large number of decisions that must be made in the field of resources needed to deal with digital marketing, including the division of the roles. Most destination marketing organizations start their digital marketing activities dedicated to promoting the tourism destination in small frameworks, however, soon there may be a need for more frequent posting and content creation, as well as for more often engagement on social media. This may require a greater number of people dedicated exclusively to

implementation of digital marketing activities. For this reason, it is necessary to determine whether digital marketing will be handled by a separate organizational unit, or will it be a part of the organizational unit that handles the traditional marketing activities. It is also required to determine the number of content creators needed in the forthcoming period, as well as whether other positions are necessary, such as an editor in charge of maintaining the continuity of the way of addressing, a web designer, an analytics expert, etc.

Target market - it is necessary to determine the exact market segments the content directed through digital media will be addressed to. In addition to the most commonly used geographic and demographic criteria for segmentation, numerous tools available online also provide great opportunities for market segmentation according to behavioral and psychographic criteria, which enables individualization of content and, therefore, achieving better results.

Content - perhaps the most important stage of tourism destination digital marketing planning process. There is an abundance of content available to tourists online, therefore it is necessary to find the way to stand out. This can be achieved with the help of designing a well-organized official website, sharing high-quality photos and videos, creating entertaining and engaging posts, being creative and innovative, etc. In addition, it is necessary to create diverse content depending on the market segment the content is intended for, as well as unique content adapted to well established norms and rules of using each individual digital platform, thus avoiding sharing the same content on numerous accounts and digital platforms. Furthermore, the terms of use the community members must respect when creating their own content and sharing it with the official accounts of the tourism destination should be clear and well established. Within this frame of reference, it is necessary to determine who is in charge of dealing with the issue of inappropriate content, who is the owner of the published content, how to maintain the transparency of accounts on social media and keep user-generated content under control at the same time, and other content related issues.

Digital tools – involves determining various technical aspects necessary for proper implementation of the tourism destination digital marketing strategy. Careful selection of adequate digital tools can greatly facilitate the implementation of the strategy, especially the planning and sharing of content. Accordingly, technical aspects such as hosting, digital tools which enable connecting the official website and social media accounts, data analysis tools and many others are of great importance. Perhaps the most important digital tool that needs to be selected is an adequate analytics tool that provides valuable information about the results achieved, as well as information on the best keywords to use, the internet search engine which enables most website traffic, the number of organic versus sponsored website visitors, and numerous other statistical data.

Budget - implies determining all costs of tourism destination digital marketing strategy implementation in detail. The budget must include the cost of human resources, that is, the people in charge of digital marketing, the cost of online advertising, as well as the cost of using digital tools which are not free of charge but are subscription-based.

Control - it is done primarily with the help of analytics tools that offer a large amount of information such as where website visitors come from, which specific pages they visit, how long they stay, as well as what type of content achieves the best results. Digital tools also provide information on the number of website visitors and social media account followers, which should be compared with the digital objectives previously set. In addition, the overall objectives of the tourism destination marketing strategy, such as desirable increase in the number of visitors to the tourism destination should also be examined during this stage.

5. Conclusion

The key element of obtaining a competitive advantage by a tourism destination is the strategic marketing planning process. A successful marketing strategy requires continuous effort, given that in marketing, today's success does not guarantee success tomorrow. For this reason, it is extremely important for every tourism destination to have clearly set objectives, to examine and evaluate the results achieved and finally, if necessary, adjust the strategy in accordance with the new information. The development of information technologies has greatly influenced modern marketing, therefore the biggest challenge for all destination marketing organizations is to be able to successfully adapt their traditional marketing activities to the online sphere.

Literature review on the relevant subjects showed that there is a certain number of papers and textbooks dedicated to the tourism destination marketing planning process, however they only cover the traditional marketing planning process. On the other hand, literature dedicated to the differences between traditional and digital marketing planning, as well as the stages of the process, is scarce. There is only a small number of papers, manuals and textbooks which elaborate the subject in general, without directly focusing on tourism. Therefore, this paper offers its contribution to tourism as an academic field of study by proposing the framework for tourism destination digital marketing planning process.

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