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INTERNET CONTENT AS A DRIVER OF CONSUMER
BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM

Platov Alexey Vladimirovich (a)*, Zikirova Shakhlo Sobirovna (b),
Lysoivanenko Elena Nikolaevna (c), Makshakova Natalia Ivanovna (d),
Troitskaya Nina Gennadievna (e)
*Corresponding author

- (a) Moscow State Institute of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism named after Yu.A. Senkevich, 43A, Kronstadt blvd., Moscow, 125499, Russia, aplato@yandex.ru
(b) Moscow State Institute of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism named after Yu.A. Senkevich, 43A, Kronstadt blvd., Moscow, 125499, Russia, zshakhlo@mail.ru
(c) Moscow State Institute of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism named after Yu.A. Senkevich, 43A, Kronstadt blvd., Moscow, 125499, Russia, 0855966@mail.ru
(d) Moscow State Institute of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism named after Yu.A. Senkevich, 43A, Kronstadt blvd., Moscow, 125499, Russia, n.makshakova@mgiit.ru
(e) Moscow State Institute of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism named after Yu.A. Senkevich, 43A, Kronstadt blvd., Moscow, 125499, Russia, troitskayang@mail.ru

Abstract

The development of the tourism industry is determined by the development of information and communication technologies. The Internet opens up new opportunities for promoting tourist products, including technologies for influencing the decision-making process when purchasing a tourist product or choosing a destination. The key behavioral processes that determines the decision-making process are the search and analysis of information. The complex structure of a tourist product requires the elaboration of a large amount of information. Due to the growing demand for Internet information, it is necessary to rethink the consumer behavior. The content provides a connection between the manufacturer and the consumer, creates trusting relationships, gives value to the process of preparing for the trip. The level of competition in the tourism industry is so high that the use of traditional marketing approaches is insufficient; there is a need for new marketing tools. Online content management can be the most effective means of promoting a travel product or destination. The purpose of this study is to identify the influence of Internet content on the process of choosing tourist destinations. The study involved 267 respondents who visited Moscow in 2020. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that such characteristics of Internet content as the level of study of the material, interaction, effective problem solution, involvement and comfort manifested a positive relationship; they affect the consumer's decision when choosing a destination.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry is an information-intensive sector, where information resources play an equally important role along with material and financial ones. The development of tourist destinations is determined by modern trends in the development of information and communication technologies. The Internet has provided the tourism sector with previously unattainable marketing opportunities, including the ability to influence the decision-making process.

The decision-making process when choosing services is much more complex in structure and dynamics than the decision-making process when choosing goods (Park et al., 2013). Several theoretical models of the decision-making process for choosing a destination have been proposed (Kotler & Keller, 2017). Consumers are interested in the quality of travels, that is why information about tourism sites is becoming increasingly in demand (Wu et al., 2014). Many tourists decide to travel, motivated by the desire to get acquainted with the cultural and historical heritage of a region (Perić et al., 2020). They show interest in culture, crafts, traditions and gastronomy (Sančanin & Dramićanin, 2019).

Motivation prompts actions and contributes to the satisfaction of needs, but the most influential factors are tourist preferences. Compared to the motivation, the preference system is more specific, it determines the choice of a particular destination and activities. There are several phases in the decision-making process (Yoo et al., 2010). The first phase is the choice of a tourist destination, followed by the planning phase: the destination has already been chosen, but it is necessary to select an accommodation facility and activities. Then there is a comparison of prices using a variety of online sites and booking accommodation; decision-making is the final stage.

The Internet has changed the traditional paradigm of information exchange. It is the bilateral exchange of information and, thus, mutual influence that comes to the fore. Potential tourists need feedback from other consumers.

The tourism sector is based on information; for tourists, confidence is a determining factor. The main behavioral process that determines the decision is the search and processing of information (Platov, Litvinova et al., 2020). Making a decision requires a large amount of information. The main function of searching for information is to minimize risks.

In the context of growing interest in information on the Internet, it is necessary to redefine the consumer behavior. The search and selection process is a complex and multi-step phenomenon, but simple and reliable tools have already been created to monitor and measure the consumer behavior.

The scientific and professional communities recognize the growing impact of online content on tourist consumer behavior and management of marketing models.

New information technologies provide consumers with the ability to identify, personalize and purchase travel products, and contribute to the globalization of the industry by providing travel companies with effective tools to distribute their product in the global market.

The main objects of research were both the development of technologies and their impact on the tourism market. Buhalis and Licata (2002) believes that in e-tourism, all key business processes are online. E-tourism is a format for establishing the entire cycle of economic relations using the Internet, providing tourism services, including transport, hotel, sightseeing, etc. E-tourism covers strategic

management and marketing issues of the use of information technology. It provides an electronic toolkit for the implementation of operational activities and achievement of strategic goals. This approach adapts and systematizes information about all business processes for managers and all stakeholders of the tourism industry, including service providers and tourists.

Consumers are increasingly using sites that provide relevant information. Tourists want to have up-to-date, reliable and complete information, safety, and efficiency. Such expectations are pushing participants in the tourism market to improve corporate websites. Numerous studies have shown that poor web design and usability leads to the loss of more than half of potential customers.

Content forms the bond between the manufacturer and the consumer, helps build trust and adds value to the travel preparation process. The level of competition in the tourism sector is so high that the use of the traditional ATL marketing block is insufficient; it is necessary to use a new marketing promotion toolkit. One of these tools is online content management; in the tourism sector, this tool can become one of the most effective means of promotion (Platov, Zikirova et al., 2020).

Consider several types of Internet resources: websites of travel agencies, hotel websites, tourist destination websites, meta search engines for tickets and hotels, information resources (data about the country, review sites, travel forums), travel blogs. The high quality of the content is typical of the sites of tour operators that post exclusive and useful materials about various tourist destinations with high-quality photos and videos. The content of travel blogs is characterized by information content and exclusive presentation.

Due to the growing popularity of travel blogs, some tourist stakeholders turn to their authors for assistance in their own promotion.

In the content marketing, the visual format is the basis of materials. Content visualization technologies are rapidly developing (3D tours, 360-degree photos and videos, virtual reality).

2. Problem Statement

The tourism industry strives to make the most of the Internet content to promote its products and services. Tourists can make faster decisions about travel destinations thanks to the online content that provides easy access to information and accommodation reservations, tickets and other travel services. Internet content has many specific characteristics that have different impacts on tourists. Tourism stakeholders should understand the mechanisms of content impact and use the most efficient ones..

3. Research Questions

Literary analysis of the impact of Internet content on the decision-making process.

Formation of the questionnaire as a research tool.

Statistical analysis of the results of the empirical study.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of Internet content that have a significant impact on the decision-making when choosing a travel destination.

5. Research Methods

This research is empirical. The survey method was used. The authors have developed a questionnaire consisting of two parts.

The first part defines the demographic characteristics of respondents, the frequency of travels, the sources of information about destinations, the types of online content used, the frequency of its use.

The second part reveals information that is key to the study. It presents questions on the characteristics of the online content and decisions of tourists. The first four points relate to the consumer's intention to make a travel destination decision. The remaining 25 points relate to the characteristics of the online content associated with the destination. These items are grouped into 8 parts:

The consumer's decision to choose a destination:

- I always use Internet sources when searching for information on a future travel,
- I primarily use Internet sources when searching for information on a future travel,
- I believe that the distribution and exchange of Internet content is generally beneficial for tourism,
- In the future, I will use Internet sources when searching for information on a future travel.

Involvement:

- I actively exchange travel content online with other users,
- I use the Internet every day to find information about tourism
- I accept invitations of other users to exchange information about tourism on the Internet.

Interaction:

- Internet content gives me access to a huge amount of information about tourist destinations,
- through the Internet I can find like-minded people,
- the Internet gives me access to the most relevant travel destination information.

Interactivity:

- I use the Internet to communicate with other users about tourism,
- I have a lot of contacts with other tourists thanks to the Internet,
- I am satisfied with the level of interactivity of Internet content on tourism topics.

Uniqueness:

- Internet content containing unique information is more attractive,
- Internet content containing unique photos and videos is more attractive,
- uniquely designed Internet content is more attractive,

Material development:

- if the Internet content about tourism is of high quality, I am ready to spend time studying it,
- I am attracted by the Internet content about tourism, if it is of high quality,
- if the Internet content about tourism is of high quality, I am ready to recommend it to my friends.

Convenience:

- easy access to tourism information increases the frequency of visits to the Internet content,
- concise Internet content is more attractive,

- well-formatted and structured content is more attractive.

Share:

- through the Internet content I share my feelings and tourist experience,
- users create the internet content to share tourist experience and feelings,
- I use the Internet content to exchange information at any time and for any reason.

An effective solution to the problem:

- the use of Internet content saves time when choosing a destination,
- the use of Internet content saves money and efforts when choosing a destination,
- the use of Internet content enriches my knowledge of destination products,
- I believe that the situation related to tourism is consistent with the information provided by the Internet.

Respondents should rate the questionnaire questions on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

Analysis in SPSS 21 showed that the entire questionnaire is highly reliable, the Alpha Cronbach coefficient was 0.907.

6. Findings

During the study, 267 respondents were interviewed using the questionnaire described in the previous section. The online survey was implemented on the basis of Google-forms and distributed via e-mail among tourists visiting Moscow in May–December 2020 (Table 01).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics	N	%
Gender		
Female	166	61
Male	104	39
Age		
18–25	16	6
26–35	98	37
36–45	61	27
46–55	75	28
56–65	11	4
Older than 65	6	2

Frequency of travels, sources of information about the destination, as well as the type of Internet content and the frequency of its use are shown in Table 02.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics	N	%
Number of tourist trips per year		
1	121	45
2–3	98	37
More than 3	41	15

	0	7	3
Destination information source			
Recommendations from friends and family		40	15
Internet		171	64
Tourist companies		45	17
Printed promotional materials		11	4
Frequency of use of online content on the destination			
Once a day		150	56
Once a week		61	23
Once a month		32	12
Several times a year		16	6
Never use		8	3
Online content topics of interest			
Experience of travelers		77	29
Prices		45	17
Maps		32	12
Interesting places		27	10
Accommodation		48	18
Transport		38	14

The correlation matrix (Table 03) demonstrates the results of a correlation analysis of the relationship between the consumer's choice of a destination and characteristics of the online content. The choice of a destination and characteristics of online content are positively correlated ($r < 0.01$): the depth of a study of the material ($r = 0.655$), effective solution to the problem ($r = 0.588$), involvement ($r = 0.528$), comfort ($r = 0.542$), interaction ($r = 0.574$), interactivity ($r = 0.461$), uniqueness ($r = 0.405$) and the ability to share ($r = 0.373$).

Table 3. Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Consumer's decision to choose a destination	1								
Involvement	0.528	1							
Interaction	0.574	0.465	1						
Interactivity	0.461	0.298	0.421	1					
Unique mature	0.405	0.311	0.443	0.421	1				
Material development level	0.655	0.243	0.421	0.430	0.497	1			
Comfort	0.542	0.319	0.387	0.355	0.422	0.431	1		
Possibility to share	0.373	0.306	0.401	0.328	0.517	0.365	0.411	1	
Efficient solution	0.588	0.388	0.489	0.421	0.432	0.524	0.482	0.384	1

Further study of the relationship between the characteristics of online content and the consumer's decision was based on the multiple regression analysis. Eight characteristics of online content are independent variables, and consumer decision is dependent. Table 04 shows results of the regression analysis.

Table 4. Results of the regression analysis

	β	R	Adjusted R ²	p
Material development level	0.279	0.731	0.533	0.000
Interaction	0.211	0.709	0.518	0.000
Efficient solution	0.263	0.719	0.528	0.004
Comfort	0.132	0.711	0.501	0.011
Involvement	0.094	0.703	0.475	0.000

Most of the characteristics (the level of study of the material, interaction, effective problem solving, involvement and comfort) had a high regression coefficient, while the three remaining characteristics (the ability to share, interactivity, uniqueness) had a low regression coefficient.

7. Conclusion

Online content management is a strategic tool for influencing consumer perception of content through the information exchange on digital platforms (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). The online content should encourage tourists to participate in interactions, influence their shopping behavior.

The theoretical significance of this study is to expand the theory of marketing. It explains how the Internet content affects tourists. This study provides a better understanding of the mechanisms of content marketing and a theoretical basis for implementing its strategies.

Considering that content is one of the key elements in the tourism marketing practice, the tourism sector should pay close attention to the characteristics of its audience and the quality of the Internet content. High-quality content will help managers to attract tourists and influence their consumer behavior. Travel companies and destinations should form the content in the digital space by providing the most effective and relevant information to meet information needs of the target segments. High-engagement content can help the company to identify needs of the audience. In addition, interaction generates powerful social impacts. Thus, the results of this study indicate that marketers and managers of travel companies must generate interactive tourism content for their target consumers in order to promote travel products via the Internet.

In addition to focusing on interaction, content creators should empower their target audience to express themselves. Online tourism content should be organized in such a way as to encourage targeted tourists to share their views and experience (Plume & Slade, 2018).

The study used only the quantitative method. A combination of the quantitative and qualitative methods would allow for further research to obtain more accurate results.

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