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SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES ON THE EXAMPLE OF CHOSEN TOURISTIC BOARDS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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Abstract

Social media marketing does not undermine the value of traditional marketing approach; instead, it enhances it and brings it up to a new level. Touristic boards, as destination management organisations, have to constantly aim creation of sustainable tourism in order to preserve and evaluate destination as a whole. Previously is not possible without systematic appliance of social media marketing strategies. Touristic boards have to strategically access social media platforms usage. It is crucial to pick the proper metrics which will ensure long-term success. The goal of the paper is to emphasise the importance of sustainable approach and the power of social media marketing strategies in a modern business environment.

Keywords: *social media marketing strategies, touristic boards, systematic approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

The power of digital marketing is hidden in a connection with customers (Stokes et al. 2017). Digital marketing has a leading role in business and it is used daily by 90% of companies worldwide (Bojović 2016). Social media changed the way we communicate, as well as the reason of internet usage (Stanojević 2011). If tourist boards are observed; Facebook, Instagram and YouTube make the most sense. Content marketing is a strong tool for reaching target customers since it is created for them and it is created around their own personal areas of interest (Stokes et al. 2017). Marketers, who work in a travel industry, need to invest a lot more effort in order to create interesting and appealing images and video clips, in order to ensure visit to destination (Harris 2017). Adjusting to new trends is important, but they need to be observed with usage of strategic thinking. Destination has become a key element of a touristic product and now, it is discussed as a unique, integral touristic product which requires managing (Petrić 2011). Social media marketing strategy can be successful only if it is created with multidisciplinary approach and

cross functional collaboration (Felix et al. 2017). Usage of metrics in tourism is essential to measure ROI; social media marketing strategy success; and it can provide instant insight about destination reputation (Stevenson, A., Hamill, J., 2012).

1.1. Research questions

The primary goal of the research is to establish understanding and systematic elements of social media marketing strategy implementation in tourist boards. Research questions were set in order to cover the most important elements and to examine previous goal in details.

1. Do tourist boards recognise social media platforms potential in reaching target customers/audience?
2. Do tourist boards follow trends of social media usage for choosing destinations?
3. Do tourist boards create social media marketing strategies?
4. Do tourist boards monitor social media marketing results?
5. Do tourist boards analyse gathered social media marketing activities results?

2. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Each question in survey matches a specific research question and they were grouped in order to provide valid conclusions. In order to both test and demonstrate consistency in collected surveys, several "control" questions, related to knowledge of specific measurement tools, were added. Non-random, quota sample is used in this research. Out of 43 contacted tourist boards, 40 of them participated in the research.

Table 1 Operationalisation of variables

Variable	
GEN1	Sex
GEN2	Age
GEN3	Education
PSP1	Tourist board in which I am employed actively implements social media marketing strategies
PSP2	I am familiar with a way social media marketing strategies are created in a tourist board in which I am employed
PSP3	I am familiar with a way social media marketing strategies are implemented in a tourist board in which I am employed
PSP4	I am familiar with social media marketing metrics
PSP5	Social media activities affect attracting of target customers
DSP1	In tourist board in which I am employed, social media marketing results are analysed
DSP2	In tourist board in which I am employed, social media marketing strategies are revised
DSP3	In tourist board in which I am employed, education is provided
TSP1	During my daily operations, I use content marketing
TSP2	During my daily operations, I study new methods and tools related to social media marketing
TSP3	During my daily operations, I use Google Analytics
TSP4	During my daily operations, I use Google AdWords
TSP5	During my daily operations, I try to increase social media posts organic reach
TSP6	During my daily operations, I use paid promotion on social media platforms
TSP7	During my daily operations, I use CPC metric (cost per click)
TSP8	During my daily operations, I use CPE metric (cost per engagement)
TSP9	During my daily operations, I monitor number of customer reach per post
TSP10	During my daily operations, I monitor number of customer reactions per post
ZP	According to Your opinion, which of the following mechanisms would be most efficient for increasing social media presence for the tourist board in which You are employed

Source: Author

Since the survey was created out of a few groups of questions, before further statistical analysis, each question was assigned with a variable in order to simplify analysis (visible in Table 1). Collected answers were then processed using SPSS programme. Furthermore, analysis results were grouped into conclusions and were used in the next step of the research (choice of tourist boards which will participate in depth interview). Sample characteristics show that women are more represented in the sample (67, 5% women, opposing 32, 5% men). Age in the sample varied; average respondent age is 38. Regarding education level, majority of respondents (57, 5%) stated university education (higher education, bachelor's degree) as their highest achieved education level.

Various relationships within sample are tested. During analysis, a difference in responds between men and women is tested as well as differences in responds between respondents with different achieved levels of education. Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples is used to test differences in ordinal measurement characteristics of the variables PSP2, PSP3, PSP4 and PSP5 between men and women.

Table 2 Mann-Whitney U

	PSP2	PSP3	PSP4	PSP5
Mann-Whitney U	165.00 0	167.00 0	173.00 0	172.50 0
<u>Wilcoxon W</u>	543.00 0	545.00 0	264.00 0	263.50 0
Z	-.354	-.287	-.077	-.105
<u>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	.724	.774	.939	.916
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.776 ^b	.820 ^b	.955 ^b	.932 ^b

- a. Grouping Variable: GEN1
- b. Not corrected for ties.

Source: Author

Table 2 showcases that there is no statistically significant difference (at the level of 5%) in average respondent rates between men and women, for all variables. Kruskal-Wallis test for more independent samples is used to test differences in ordinal measurement characteristics of the variables TSP1, TSP2, TSP3, TSP4, TSP5, TSP6, TSP7, TSP8, TSP9 and TSP10 between the respondents of different level of education. There is no statistically significant difference (at the level of 5%) in average respondent rates between the respondents of different level of education for all variables. However, there is statistically significant difference in average respondent rates between the respondents of different level of education for the variable TSP6 at the level of 10% (asyp.sig is 6, 8%).

Table 3 Ranks of variable TSP6 in Kruskal-Wallis

	GEN 3	N	Mean Rank
TSP6	SSS	5	11.40
	VŠS	6	14.42
	VSS	23	22.17
	<u>Magistar znanosti</u>	5	26.00
	<u>Doktor</u>	1	36.50
	Total	40	

Source: Author

Table 3 showcases that respondents with higher achieved education level give higher rank to variable TSP6 (This information will be put in context in the final part of the paper).¹

Table 4 One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov

		PSP1	DSP1	DSP2	DSP3
N		40	40	40	40
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	4.45	2.55	3.05	4.03
	Std. Deviation	.714	1.260	1.632	1.271
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.354	.319	.190	.229
	Positive	.221	.319	.190	.190
	Negative	-.354	-.181	-.109	-.229
Test Statistic		.354	.319	.190	.229
<u>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</u>		.000 ^c	.000 ^c	.001 ^c	.000 ^c

- a. Test distribution is Normal.
- b. Calculated from data.
- c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Source: Author

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is used to test distribution normality of variables PSP1, DSP1, DSP2 and DSP3. Since these variables are not distributed normally; variable correlation is tested with Spearman's correlation coefficient.

¹ In order to clarify the table content, translation is in order. SSS-high school, VŠS-undergraduate, VSS-bachelor degree, Magistar znanosti-master degree, Doktor-PhD.

Table 5 Spearman's correlation coefficient

			PSP1	DSP1	DSP2	DSP3
Spearman's rho	PSP1	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.			
		N	40			
DSP1		Correlation Coefficient	-.367*	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.		
		N	40	40		
DSP2		Correlation Coefficient	-.278	.368*	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.083	.019	.	
		N	40	40	40	
DSP3		Correlation Coefficient	-.246	.606**	.567**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.126	.000	.000	.
		N	40	40	40	40

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author

Test results (showcased in Table 5) suggest statistically significant correlation (at the level of 10%) between variables PSP1 and DSP1 with weak and negative correlation. This correlation is not statistically significant at the level of 5%. These results imply that with higher level of social media marketing result analysis, strategies are less implemented. It has to be indicated that previously stated is not logical, since it would be impossible to analyse strategies results without implementation of said strategy. Test results suggest statistically significant correlation (at the level of 5%) between variables DSP1 and DSP2 with weak and positive correlation. Correlation between variables DSP1 and DSP3 is positive, moderate and statistically significant (at the level of 1%). Correlation between variables DSP2 and DSP3 is positive, moderate and statistically significant (at the level of 1%).

Last variable was formed as a lone question with several suggested answers. Respondents filled it as following: 30% of respondents states how guidelines for improvement regarding social media marketing strategies implementation would be the best mechanism for tourist board in which they are employed; according to 27, 5% respondents, attending conferences with digital marketing topics would be the best choice; 20% respondents believe how gaining certificates for the usage of new digital presence tools is the best mechanism; 17, 5% respondents stated that regular meetings with purpose of sharing knowledge regarding upcoming trends is the right choice and only 5% believe that tourist board in which they are employed does not require any improvements.

Each group of variables (correlated to specific research question) has a matching descriptive statistic done accompanied with Wilcoxon test in order to decide how high the level of agreement is (This test is used for variables for which Likert scale was used and because of their rank features). Variable PSP5 is correlated with research question 1. According to conducted analysis, mean is 4,58 with standard deviation 0,71 while p value is <0,001. Previously stated leads to conclusion that there is high level of agreement with variable PSP5 among respondents. Research question 2 is answered with the variables DSP3, TSP1, TSP2, TSP4 and TSP6. Analysis results showcase that mean is 2,98 and standard deviation is 1,27 regarding variable DSP3. Its p

value is 0,015, suggesting to high level of agreement with statement among respondents. Means and standard deviations for remaining variables suggest how respondents show highest level of agreement with variable TSP1, while with variable TSP6 they show the lowest level of agreement. Since p value for neither variable is higher than 0,05 it can be concluded that there is high level of agreement with variables TSP1, TSP2, TSP4 and TSP6 among respondents. Research question 3 is answered with variables PSP1, PSP2 and PSP3. Variable PSP3 has the highest level of agreement among respondents, while variable PSP1 has the lowest level of agreement. Furthermore, p value, for all observed variables, is not higher than 0,05 which leads to conclusion that respondents have high level of agreement for all variables. Variables PSP4, DSP1, TSP3, TSP7, TSP8, TSP9 and TSP10 are correlated with research question 4. According to conducted analysis, mean is 4,45 with standard deviation 1,26, while p value is $<0,001$ for variable DSP1. Previously stated leads to conclusion that there is high level of agreement with variable DSP1 among respondents. Accurately, majority of respondents claims that social media marketing results, in tourist board in which they are employed, are analysed at least once per quarter. Means and standard deviations for remaining variables suggest how respondents show highest level of agreement with variable TSP10, while with variable TSP8 the show the lowest level of agreement. What is more, respondents show high level of agreement with variables PSP4, TSP3, TSP9 and TSP10 and low level of agreement with variables TSP7 and TSP8. In the begging of this part of the paper, it was stated that some specific questions (related to the knowledge of specific measurement tools) were added as a control variables in order to test consistency and if there is truly systematic approach towards social media marketing strategies implementation in tourist boards. Since the level of agreement with such questions was low, while with the questions correlated to them was high, it can be stated that there is no consistency in answers. Consequently, it can be stated that there are no elements of systematic approach towards implementation of social media marketing strategies, despite high ranking of certain variables. If tourist boards are not tracking and measuring social media marketing results, they cannot analyse them. Subsequent represents one of the foundations of systematic implementation of strategies. Variables DSP2 and TSP5 are correlated with research question 5. According to conducted analysis (for variable DSP2), mean is 3,95 with standard deviation 1,63, while p value is $<0,001$. Previously stated leads to conclusion that there is high level of agreement with variable PSP5 among respondents (social media marketing results are revised at least once in quarter). Analysis of variable TSP5 suggests that mean is 4,05 with standard deviation 0,90, while p value is not higher than 0,05 which leads to conclusion that there is high level of agreement among respondents.

2.1. Sustainability analysis

Tourist boards Supetar and Bol are both present on social media platforms, they publish content regularly and according to survey analysis, it seems that they use systematic approach toward strategy implementation. It is important to state how these two boards are generators of tourism at the island of Brač and conducting depth interview with them can lead to creation of integral destination product for the island.

Respondent from tourist board Supetar is interested in informal type of education but attending conferences with digital marketing topics is financially beyond reach. Survey analysis suggests that there is systematic approach towards implementation of social media marketing strategies. During social media presence analysis, using of content marketing can be seen. Elements of strategic thinking are strongly present and can be noticed during the whole interview. Director plans to include tech innovations in the future in order to upgrade touristic offer of Supetar. Overall, main issue is that there is no strategy at all. Subsequently means that there is no systematic approach, marketing metrics are not used and results are neither analysed nor revised. Respondent believes in social media platforms as a tool to reach targeted customers. There is no strategic approach towards definition of targeted customers and no planned campaigns. What is more, respondent believes that currently, social media is not a tool used to choose Supetar as a

destination; rather, it is a tool used only upon arrival. Respondent noticed how posts with present emotional elements and live recordings generate most reactions. Respondent states the need for the change of legal frame and financial model in the near future. *Word of mouth* phenomenon is the best way for destination promotion. Currently used social media platforms are chosen solely because of their popularity (not strategically). Respondent claims that there are several administrative issues with GDPR directive implementation. Brač- the island of culture and adventure is umbrella visual identity created in order to preserve and promote the island of Brač as an integral destination product. Unfortunately, there was not enough initiative from other stakeholders.

General impression before interview held in Bol was good regarding open concept working space. Respondent is attending conferences with digital marketing topics often. Survey was filled by a tourist board director who argues that tourist board Bol is excellent in all observed areas. In reality, it is revealed that social media marketing strategy does not exist at all. Subsequently, there is lack of monitoring, analysing and revising which stands in a way of a systematic approach toward implementation of social media marketing strategies. Respondent believes in social media platforms as a tool to reach target customers. In general, tourist board Bol lacks in understanding trends and they rely on *sun and sea* tourism, which is aged and not relevant anymore. Respondent has noticed higher level of reactions with *live content*. Respondent believes in *word of mouth* marketing, but emphasises how it can be both positive and negative and that tourist board need to use social media platforms carefully. She suggests that content marketing and viral marketing would be the best types for the tourist board in which she is employed. Tourist board Bol is present on several social media platforms. According to respondent, GDPR directive is useful, yet there needs to be more education regarding its implementation. Respondent strongly believes in positive impact of social media marketing in tourism and she believes that they need to be used more.

2.2. Results overview

Differences between analysis results among depth interview and survey are significant. Despite not having social media marketing strategies at all, respondents from tourist boards Supetar and Bol claimed how they implement strategies systematically and use tools and metrics on daily basis (in the survey). Since only these two boards were chosen for depth interview, conclusions cannot be generalised. However, it can be indicative. What is more, inconsistency among results collected by different methods is concerning. Elements of strategic thinking are present in tourist boards. Nevertheless, systematic approach cannot be based on strategic thinking itself. Quality social media marketing strategy is essential for those who want to succeed in modern market, regardless business field. It is interesting how tourist boards Supetar and Bol are different in their approach towards social media. Tourist board Supetar has significantly higher level of strategic thinking and use of content marketing is obvious. Tourist board Bol has more knowledge about social media and they give more attention to education. At last, answers to research questions will follow.

1. Do tourist boards recognise social media platforms potential in reaching target customers/audience?

It can be concluded that analysed tourist boards recognise social media platforms potential in reaching target customers. Also, respondents are aware and completely understand influence of social media in everyday life. They understand the role of social media in tourism and the necessity for adequate social media presence management. Respondents do not completely understand competitive advantage that can be gained through systematic approach towards social media.

2. Do tourist boards follow trends of social media usage for choosing destinations?

Tourist boards do not completely understand concept of trend regarding usage of social media for choosing destination. Trends are partially followed and tracked by simple social media searches.

Subsequently, trends are not followed adequately. Respondents are willing to use modern technologies and to coordinate their operations with new trends, but only if they are obligated to. Previously is connected both to lack of knowledge and insufficient finances. They are not entirely familiar with the rise of usage of mobile phones for gathering information about destination. They understand *word of mouth* as a phenomenon and they observe it as one of the most significant factors in destination choosing process. They have superficial knowledge regarding special types and new forms of marketing.

3. Do tourist boards create social media marketing strategies?

It is highly concerning that some of the tourist boards consider creation of strategy a thinking process. Strategy, as a document, has to exist. Otherwise, it would be impossible to track set goals. Without strategy, there is no systematic approach and, in long-term, without social media marketing strategy there is no adequate destination management. Not all of the tourist boards need to have equally complex strategy, but it has to exist, at least in its simplest form.

4. Do tourist boards monitor social media marketing results?

During research results analysis, it has been pointed out how, without proper strategy, social media marketing results cannot be monitored. Results monitoring is consist out of usage of many different tools and methods. It cannot be said how results monitoring is just tracking number of reactions and engagement per post. Previous is a part of result monitoring, but it represents basic activity and it cannot be called systematic. Lack of understanding about ROI and customer satisfaction in social media context was noticeable among respondents, but that is just a consequence of not creating a strategy. One needs to be aware of a wide range of available metrics. It needs to be emphasized that one does not need to use all of the existing metrics in order to achieve results. They have to be chosen to fit specific goals and everyday needs of each tourist board.

5. Do tourist boards analyse gathered social media marketing activities results?

It has been determined that tourist boards do not understand social media marketing strategy implementation in full. Once again, it needs to be emphasized how significance of social media marketing metrics and their usage is not in gathering results, yet in their adequate analysing and grouping in order to form them into useful information. Influence that can be achieved with proper results analysis is not only hidden in larger market share and better position in market but also in simplifying and operationalisation of everyday business.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is no systematic approach towards implementation of social media marketing strategies in the observed tourist boards!

2.3. Bullet points for tourist boards

The following can be used as a starting point in achieving systematic implementation of social media marketing strategies.

- Situation analysis
- Education
- Trends
- New forms of marketing
- Integrated product
- Implementation of innovations
- Mission, vision and specific goals
- Budget

- Implementation
- Metrics
- Social media platforms
- Customer engagement
- Micro-influencers
- Virtual reality

3. CONCLUSION

Multichannel marketing and integrated touristic product are essential for competitive advantage in modern touristic market; and require holistic and strategic thinking combined with creation of strategy through multidisciplinary and cross functional relationship. It is not an easy task to gain competitive advantage when changes are happening basically every day and are comprehensive. Fast changes and battle for each and every customer/visitor, assisted with communication and information technologies, provide customers with additional bargaining power. In time, where everything is easily accessible and when interaction possibilities are big, there is no room for bad service, unfinished product and unspecified goals. Social media usage has reached unthinkable business significance and they are used to move boundaries. The purpose of strategy is not its existence nor its implementation, yet its success and revision. Clearly set goals, lead to success across all departments in tourist board. Systematic approach towards social media marketing strategy implementation cannot be expected, unless there is a destination management plan. Tourism (as an industry) has to be sustainable. Tourism is a service, and travelling is an activity which shapes a modern man. Social media marketing strategy must be created in order to manage everything that is surrounding potential visitors, and in order to provide residents (especially at islands) with higher quality of life.

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