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WEBSITES AS A PROMOTING TOOL FOR THE IDENTITY OF TOURISTIC DESTINATIONS

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Abstract

Since its advent, the Internet has become an important tool for tourism. Furthermore, some studies tend to indicate that this may contribute directly to the process of identity formation of a tourism destination. Thus, this paper investigates how websites can help in promoting the identity of tourist destinations on the Internet. The study is characterized as exploratory qualitative in nature, which is constituted from a desk research. It was possible to verify that the website is a key means for managing the identity of a tourist destination, as this can help visitors to form a positive image of the place being visited from the information that makes up the identity of the destination.

Keywords: Identity. Turistic destinations. Websites.

Resumo

Desde o seu advento, a internet passou a ser uma importante ferramenta para atividade turística. Além disso, alguns estudos tendem a indicar que esta pode contribuir diretamente no processo de formação da identidade de uma destinação turística. Neste sentido, este artigo investiga como os websites podem contribuir na promoção da identidade de destinos turísticos na internet. O estudo caracteriza-se como exploratório de natureza qualitativa, sendo este constituído a partir de um *desk research*. Foi possível verificar que o website é um meio fundamental para o gerenciamento da identidade de uma destinação turística, visto que este pode ajudar

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os visitantes a formarem uma imagem positiva do local a ser visitado a partir das informações que compõe a identidade da destinação.

Palavras-chave: Identidade. Destinos turísticos. Websites.

Introduction

Echtner and Ritichie (2003) argue that the growth of tourism has become a competitive market and the allocations should differentiate themselves from their competitors in the minds of consumers, and a key element for this differentiation is the destination image management formed by tourists from their identity. In order to form a positive image, it is necessary that the organizational identity has been defined with enduring characteristics that contribute to the distinction and uniqueness of an organization (Albert; Whetten, 1985; Dhalla, 2007). Thus, as the process of image creation is not controllable (Grönroos, 2009; Zomerdijk; Voss, 2010), the responsible tourist destination should focus on what you have control. That is, their identity (Meenaghan, 1995).

From the identity, people form the image by what was seen through the reflection of the number of impressions and multidimensional experiences accumulated during their relationship with the object (Simões; Dibb; Fisk, 2005), this study is the object tourist destination. The image perceived is influenced from the impressions and behaviors obtained, subject to beliefs, values, stereotypes, positions and views on a particular object (Biloslavo; Trnavcevic, 2009). Considering these aspects, it becomes important to investigate the way in which destinations can form their identity based on the principles and features of the site, promoting them through the virtual environment.

As the internet became the primary means of marketing for tourism, it is observed that the authors indicate that a tourist destination should give more attention to how their identity will be broadcast on the web (Kotler Et Al., 2006; Beldona; Cai, 2006; Kaplanidou; Vogt, 2006; Govers, Go; Kumar, 2007; Teichmann; Zins, 2008). For example, the site will be determined by image representing his identity, wherein the tourists know the characteristics of the environment.

In this sense, the internet has its direct relevance in promoting tourist destinations, and this means one of the main ways to inform customers (potential tourists) about the tourist destinations (Kotler Et Al., 2006; Beldona; Cai, 2006;

Kaplanidou ; Vogt, 2006; Govers, Go; Kumar, 2007; Teichmann; Zins, 2008). The usefulness of a destination site is viewed from its design, content and technology elements that facilitate user interaction (Govers, Go; Kumar, 2007).

The ability to search for information on the Internet exposes tourists to a series of comparative analyzes of costs and benefits. The main benefits are related to the time savings, convenience, and variety of products available at any time and place, as well as easy to make comparisons at the time of purchase decision process. Because of this, those wishing to travel for leisure usually use this tool for more detailed information on the destinations (Beldona; Cai, 2006).

A website should contain information on which consumers can consider as useful and interesting, besides encouraging the purchase of the product or service, encourage repeat visits and spread to others. Users believe that content available should be relevant to their decisions and wish that websites are dynamic so they can generate useful experiences (Lovelock; Wirtz, 2001).

Winter, Saunders and Hart (2003), suggest that the sites should be considered as electronic storefronts that have symbolic features capable of creating good impressions of the company; here, the destination. When visitors are symbols, they are compared to mental models stored in memory and used to form impressions on the site. With this, the user can better analyze the company and usually these can influence their buying behavior (Winter; Saunders; Hart, 2003).

Thus, this paper investigates how websites can help in promoting the identity of tourist destinations on the Internet. The study is characterized as exploratory qualitative in nature, which is constituted from a desk research. Presented to contextualize the investigated object, and then presents a literature review on the topic, closing then with final remarks as well as the references used for the theoretical articulation of this study.

Organizational Identity: Reflecting on Logic Tourism

What makes an organization stand apart from others are its peculiarities perceived as stable over time, allowing it to be made a link between the past, present and future (Albert; Whetten, 1985). Some studies have argued that the core and the distinctive characteristics of an organization when formed and consolidated became something immutable and unalterable, except for long periods of time. However, in

the 1990s, some researchers began to defend the idea that identity, yet flexible, can be durable even being changed and enhanced as necessary (Gioia; Thomas, 1996; Ravasi; Schultz, 2006). This concept therefore implies the possibility that organizations can build an identity that gives them greater competitive advantage (Rekom, 1997; Dhalla, 2007).

In the last ten years through several studies there was the impossibility of having a single definition of identity because this depends on the angle from which is analyzed (Almeida 2005). The author states that from this approach, Van Riel (2005) described four types of identity: perceived, designed, implemented and desired.

- **Identity perceived:** it is from the collection of attributes seen as typical members of the organization - which is the essence of the organization, which distinguishes it from others and what remains over the years.

- **Identity designed:** it is the self-presentation of the institution, ie, as the organization announces its key attributes to their internal and external audiences through communication and its symbols.

- **Identity desired:** is the dream figure of senior management, which they believe the organization should infer from his leadership.

- **Identity applied:** consists of signs of behavior of members of the organization that are transmitted consciously or unconsciously all organizational levels.

Due to the proposed objective, the focus of analysis in this study occurred specifically designed web identity with concern to analyze how the creation of an identity can influence the perceived image of tourists. Based on the literature so far, it is assumed that, for tourists form a positive image of the place, this identity must be formed from its specific characteristics presented in a pleasant and stimulating.

The concept of identity designed to include corporate identity, considered as a visual translation of what the organization (Almeida, 2005). But also incorporates all the talk of top management, what is the organization, which can be expressed through institutional brochures, cdrom, homepage and internet, newspapers and / or internal magazines, lectures, intranet, to press reports, advertisements, promotional campaigns and institutional among various media and communication actions, adopted by the organization as a way to position themselves internally and externally (Van Riel, 2005).

Thus, in its sociological sense, the identity can be conceptualized as a source of meaning and experience of a people, generated from the process of constructing meaning based on a cultural attribute, or a set of interrelated cultural attributes which take precedence over other sources of meaning (Castells, 1999). In this sense, it is considered that the identity of a tourist destination can also be established through memory which identifies its people and spread to other societies.

Moreover, the mark of a tourist destination is made from the process of developing their identity and should be communicated to visitors and targeted by a name, slogan, symbol, design or a combination of features that enables to create a positive image of the place (Lee; Cai; O'leary, 2006). It is the combination of all elements associated with the place essentially symbolic and experience levels being experienced possible (Morgan et al. 2004; Harish, 2010).

Unlike the image of conventional products, a mark of a destination has several distinct characteristics that may be considered as composite product because of the combination of several elements (Harish, 2010). It should be noted that there is a significant difference between brands of companies and a destination.

While products and services related to the sales companies are intended to generate profits and increase the value of their shares in the market, tourism is developed with more altruistic goals such as: increasing the economic prosperity of the people through employment generation and enabling the sustainable site (Mihailovich, 2006).

The identity of a destination, characterized by its brand name, is important because potential visitors come to make their decisions considering also the confidence built from the perception and experience in the locality. Brands effective not only serve to reinforce a positive image, but also help fight the negative, because shaping new ideas and associations (Mihailovich, 2006).

The brand identity should be based on reality, reflected by the main strengths of the personality of the product and not through the production of new realities which does not match the destination (Hankinson, 2001). In this sense, Chon (1991) suggests that this should be managed in two ways: a) by creating a positive image of the destination, highlighting their strengths and promoting aspects that have better public perception, and b) the identification and analysis of areas that the picture is so bad the problems are corrected.

The process of building and managing the identity of a place is complex and needs to be planned so that their development can generate positive assessments of the site by the visitors. According Hanlan and Kelly (2005), there are some points that are important in developing a destination brand, it is necessary:

- Meet competitive brands destinations;
- Make use of marketing research, beyond the concern with the veracity that wants to transmit, and
- Know the important characteristics of the destination to which these can be viewed on the brand.

In the same line of thought, Pike (2005) justifies the complexity of this process aiming at least six reasons:

- Tourist Destinations are more multidimensional than consumer goods and other services;
- The market interests are heterogeneous and difficult segmenting;
- There are several political influences involved;
- There is a need to harmonize the interests of the local population with the brand manages the allocation;
- There is a register that enables manages marketing allocation to contact customers who have tried the product and
- There are difficulties in financing, both in absolute and in consistency.

Develop a positive identity is fundamental, because this gives meaning and direction to destination, help establish a relationship between the consumer and the location, and create engagement between functional benefits, emotional and self-expression (Morgan, et al., 2004) . Once formed, the identity of a destination must pass tests that will support their strategic management.

These analyzes should be carried out considering these three items: analysis of the tourism sector, competition analysis and self-analysis (Fodness, 1994). In the first, one should focus on identifying new trends and understanding the motivations and behaviors of tourists. In the second, it is interesting to develop research to identify key actions taken by competitors to attract tourists. In the third, a destination must identify its true position in the market through a systematic preparation of self-critical analysis.

It is also known that in addition to its development, other factors are important in characterizing the identity of a place, such as culture, the physical structure and its natural beauty. However, it is considered that these aspects are more susceptible to changes due to natural forces such as globalization mainly cyclical, it may alter the dynamics of socio-economic activities and population in the perspective of the business cycle of a region.

Um and Crompton (1990) concluded that the image projected by the potential visitor when they are selecting the destination you want to visit, was an important factor in purchasing decisions, suggesting that identity is as valuable as the attractions. In the same line of thought, Buhalis (2000) states that the most important criterion is to choose a destination for your image. The image is the set of expectations and perceptions that the potential visitor has on the target, and second Mackay and Fesenmaier (1997), as much attention as the exclusion of attributes or symbols that may influence the way the allocations are perceived.

Anyone or better tourist has an image of a particular place, even without visiting him or been exposed to any advertising campaign (Echtner; Ritichie, 1991). This is because the image formation is not only based on induced sources, but also by organic sources, these models quite common in the literature (for example Gartner, 1986; Leisen, 2001). However, there are still other examples as proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999). The model of these authors is based on the relationship between stimulus factors and social factors, with three levels of evaluation the cognitive, affective and connotative. External stimuli (from sources of information and previous experiences) compose the factors stimuli, since the psychological characteristics or psychographic (values, personality and motivation) and social (education level, status, age, etc.). Compose personal factors.

The tourist, before making the trip, makes predictions of the experiences you want to experience. These are based on the emotions that the destination evokes in his memory, by comments from friends, reading reports and advertisements. Thus, their decision is based on the image that formed and hopes to find (expectations). Information passed by the organizations (airlines, bus stations, hotels, travel agencies) along with information from relatives and friends help develop this image (Crompton, 1979). In addition, the sources of communication such as television,

magazines, movies, news, internet, friends and relatives help in the process of image formation by the site visitor potential (Govers, Go; Kumar, 2007).

Sharing with this idea earlier, Cai (2002) also proposes that these images can be influenced and managed to build the desired image, so that helps to enhance the identity of the destination and facilitate consumption. For example, Byon and Zhang (2010) developed a scale in order to see how the image of a destination affects the consumption of services related to tourism. The idea would be to observe how the image was formed by the target individual. Note that the communication should be careful not to generate a distorted picture of the message you want to pass. Thus, the choice of destination will depend imaging favorable that the consumer has a particular place (Echtner; Ritichie, 2003). Otherwise, consumption of tourism tends not to occur (Leisen, 2001; Bignami, 2002).

So you can see why some sources of information are important in shaping the image of the destination, as a positive experience creates a positive image (Chon, 1991). In their analysis, the author presents a virtuous cycle demonstrating that positive image can generate repeat visits and, if repetition is also a positive experience, the cycle restarts. Within this cycle, one can include the information passed on to friends and relatives (Crompton, 1979; Govers, Go; Kumar, 2007) on the positive experience and can bring new visitors to the destination and so on.

Website: Identity Promotion Tool From Destination

The tour companies are among the largest service providers in the world. With increasing demand, this market is among the most prosperous in the electronics industry and information technology, through the Internet, can add value to these services and facilitate the dissemination of information needed by consumers (Nysveen; Methlie; Pedersen, 2003; Lee; Cai; O'leary, 2006). Thus, this virtual access environment has become the primary means of marketing of tourist destinations (Kim; Fesenmaier, 2008).

The internet has transformed the tourism activity, modifying the way in which tourism products are presented as the services are provided, as well as marketing and communication due to its ease of access (Balanza; Nadal, 2003). According to Williams and Palmer (1999), most of the travelers using virtual platforms as a means

to research and buy. Corroborating this idea, Nysveen, Methlie and Pedersen (2003) argue that this environment should be considered as a suitable tool for tourism businesses to develop their business with the aim of generating added value for its customers, and try to strengthen his image hereby.

Noting that the websites are important tools for tourism, theme went on to win the attention of many researchers (Buhalis; Deimezi, 2004; Fursich; Robins, 2004; Skadberg; Kimmel, 2004; Fiore; Jin; Kin, 2005; Govers; Go; Kumar, 2007; Castaneda; Frias; Rodriguez, 2007; Frias; Rodriguez; Castaneda, 2008; Morrison; Taylor, Douglas, 2004; Bai; Law; Wen, 2008; Biz, 2009).

Skadberg and Kimmel (2004) conducted a study to evaluate empirically the visitors' experience when browsing websites. The authors used the standard theory of flow applied along with structural equation modeling. They found that, while individuals visited a website, the experience of flow was identified by distortions of time, pleasure and telepresence. Although the results show evidence of involvement, there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the inter-relationships between the elements of a website were closely related to people's experience at the time of flow. This research also showed that, while visiting a site, the experience of flow influences a number of important results are normally expected by developers of websites. They also verified that when people are in a state of flux tend to look more on the content displayed on the website. Moreover, as we learn from the information available, individuals can submit change of attitude and behavior, including taking positive decisions about what you are checking.

Aiming to check which services offered by tour companies can be perceived by customers as an added value, Nysveen, Methlie and Pedersen (2003), concluded in their study, consumers value the search engines, the interaction with the service before consumption and personalization site. These findings align with the ideas of King (2002) states that when consumers due to the dynamics of the internet, there are more static targets for promotional messages and are increasingly dictating what and how they want to receive information. Therefore, it is necessary that the websites are informative, interactive and dynamic. For the author, the consumer now controls the marketing, the distribution process of the travel and tourism information, deciding how and when to access them.

In an attempt to verify the influence of the Internet on the satisfaction of a destination, Castaneda, Frias Rodriguez (2007) found that tourist satisfaction with the internet is more related to the enjoyment of holidays. This relationship, however, was moderated by two variables: previous experience of tourists in the process of finding information and tourist experience on the Internet. These findings show that the Internet is a crucial factor in promoting and managing the image of tourist destinations (Castaneda; Frias; Rodriguez, 2007).

Kim and Fesenmaier (2008) also come to the conclusion that it is necessary to develop a simple website, but dynamic and engaging so that users can have a positive first impression of a tourist destination. The results showed that the two most important components that influence positive impression were the inspiration (ideas, feelings, impulses) and usability. The authors also found that the main function of websites, informative and was not explored these other elements that could improve the first impression. However, informativeness was fourth in the ranking of the variables that most influenced the positive impression of the participants, before getting the variable credibility. With this, the researchers realized that the work of building a website quality in terms of aesthetics and usability shines even more relevant than content.

Moreover, recently, Chaiprasit et al. (2011) conducted a study on the expectations and preferences of prospective Thai tourists face of travel sites. The research aimed to extend this body of knowledge and provide theoretical and empirical evidence on the expectations and preferences of tourists for the roles of functionality, usability factors and quality of tourism information sites. The results indicated that: there was no significant difference in the preference of sites for tourists, tourists prefer to have more quality functionality and usability of the site, the three attributes that best explain the functionality and usability of the site are: ease of physical access less response time and easy access to specific details, and the three attributes that best explain the quality of information are reliable, updated, useful and sufficient information on the products and services available in tourist destination, as well as images of the facilities. The authors also conclude that companies should manage their websites with relevant information, since this is one of the main ways to search for information, supporting the ideas of Chon (1991).

Conclusions

From the theoretical approach, it is possible to consider that websites play a fundamental role in the construction of identity and in the process of forming the image of the destination by tourists. This is because their involvement in the virtual environment tends to be high when stimulated by the information and images that reflect the place. Moreover, the process of finding information occurs in several stages, changing according to the evolution of research and involvement of the tourist at the time of shipping (Chon, 1991; Echtner; Ritchie, 2003).

It is worth noting that Choi, Lehto and Morrison (2007) found that the formation of positive image to access website for a tourist destination, it concentrates in the first moments of interaction with the locality, which suggests the importance of portals in the process of induced image formation and choice of tourist. Therefore, it is understood that the website is a key means for managing the identity of a tourist destination, as this can help visitors to form a positive image of the place being visited from the information that makes up the identity of the destination.

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