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Florian Zach
National Laboratory for Tourism & eCommerce, School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Temple University

Elena Marchiori
webatelier.net Laboratory Faculty of Communication Sciences Università della Svizzera italiana (USI)

Lorenzo Cantoni
webatelier.net Laboratory Faculty of Communication Sciences Università della Svizzera italiana (USI)

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Web Marketing and Social Media:
The case of Adoption and Outsourcing by Swiss DMOs

Florian Zach
National Laboratory for Tourism and *e*Commerce
School of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Temple University, USA

Elena Marchiori
webatelier.net Laboratory
Faculty of Communication Sciences
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), Switzerland

and

Lorenzo Cantoni
webatelier.net Laboratory
Faculty of Communication Sciences
Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), Switzerland

ABSTRACT

A new perspective in destination marketing organizations' (DMOs) effort to reach their audience involves the analysis of the electronic-word-of-mouth (eWOM) presented on social media websites. Organizations have little control over what is said online about a destination and oftentimes rely on outside providers to better understand online conversations. The purpose of this study was to identify and assess the adoption of web marketing strategies by Swiss DMOs with a focus on the use of partners and top management support. It was found that web marketing success is driven by eWOM and search engine monitoring activities, whereas paid activities (e.g. search engine optimization) had a negative significant effect. This suggests that paid services do not achieve desired outcomes. Last, partner collaboration was found to contribute to the overall success, as long as partners are brought in later in the process.

Keywords: *web marketing adoption, destination marketing organization, outsourcing*

INTRODUCTION

Today a critical factor for successful destination marketing is success in online promotion and communication. The dramatic increase in new technologies and their application for marketing creates both an opportunity and a challenge for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) as they are forced to respond to these changes faster. DMOs, as the primary marketers of tourism destinations, adopt new technologies and set internal policies to successfully use new applications. Past literature identified the importance of DMO leaderships' understanding of new challenges and the meaningful use of new technologies to seek excellence in destination marketing (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000; Inversini and Buhalis, 2009). Typically the use and implementation of new technologies is not a straight forward road to success, but rather a back and forward exercise (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000, Rogers, 2003). Tourism research mainly focused on internal organizational settings that drive web marketing adoption, such as continuity of innovation and perceived contribution of this investment to the overall success of DMOs' web marketing programs (e.g. Zach, Gretzel and Xiang, 2010). However, research so far mostly neglected the often practiced acquisition or buy-in to knowledge from partners. With the objective to contribute to research on information technology related

innovation in DMOs this study aims to identify and assess the innovation and adoption of web marketing strategies by Swiss DMOs with a focus on: (a) the perceived usefulness and success of web marketing activities, and (b) how web marketing activities and consumer social media contributions add value to web marketing programs.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Destination Marketing Organizations and Social Media

The continuous development of information communication technologies during the last decade has had profound implications for the whole tourism industry as a growing number of potential travellers began to seek for tourism information online (Steinbauer and Werthner, 2007). Scholars underlined how the Internet represents the primary source of information in the tourism domain (Gretzel, Yuan and Fesenmaier, 2000; Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006). In this context, DMOs usually are users and not developers of technologies to present information about their destination on the Internet; i.e. DMOs purchase outside help to implement information technologies to keep up with current trends in web marketing.

Destination marketing organizations use their official website to interact with tourists in order to promote the destination image and provide information about the destination (Choi et al. 2007). A new perspective in the DMOs' effort of reaching the target audience, involves online conversations that bring with them a communication change that involves a consistent online place branding presence and an active participation on online conversations (Go and Govers, 2009). Examples are recommendation websites, social media communications etc. that challenge the official websites. Users' interaction with information sources outside of the official sources can potentially influence the intention to visit a destination. Especially electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) through social media enables users to easily share their experiences online (O'Connor, 2008). eWOM offers opportunities for a DMO to understand what past travellers experienced at the destination and/or prospective travellers expect for their future trips (Hofbauer et al. 2010). eWOM summarizes on-going social discussion and reported experiences about tourism destinations which are the key drivers for travel decision making. The analysis of user generated contents is an efficient way to indirectly measure public attitudes, belief, and values related to tourism destinations. Together with media coverage data this indirect measurement enables a prediction of public opinion over time (Bengson and Fan, 1999; Deephouse, 2000). Thus, DMOs can learn from information provided by visitors through social media websites and applications. According to Sigala and Marinidis (2010), DMOs should start to use social media opportunities for collaborative destination management to continually enhance visitor experiences.

Adoption and Outsourcing in Web Marketing

Destination marketing organizations that implement web marketing aspects are presented with two opportunities to learn. First, the decision to add new marketing channels and to stay up to date to communicate with potential destination visitors forces DMOs to understand new technologies and their potential. Typically, this process includes the collaboration with experts and consultants to best use these new technologies. Second, working with partners enables DMOs to share risk, access otherwise unattainable resources and develop new services that could not be created if working by themselves (Stuart, 2000). Similarly, research furthermore suggests that collaborations enable mutual learning and the adoption of new technologies (Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996). Indeed, Wang and Fesenmaier (2006) identified that the inclusion of external partners into innovation and adoption processes adds value to destination

competitiveness and marketing success. Activities specifically designed to manage online communication and promotion, include: promotion via search engine; usages analysis; eWOM analysis, as they represent the main activities which might drive a powerful online performance of a company (Cantoni and Ceriani, 2007). Moreover, in a recent study by Zach et al. (2010), the adoption of web promotion features is a driver of web marketing success of tourism organizations.

Top Management Support for Innovation and Knowledge acquisition from external firms

Internal support for innovation through resources, leadership and an understanding of Internet technologies (Zach et al. 2010) as well as external knowledge (Yang, 2007) have been identified as a critical driver for organizational and destination success. Organizational support to develop and maintain business relationships is mostly formed by leadership. Top management sets the foundation for their organization and, more importantly, for their employees to develop and maintain business relationships with other organizations. Employees could understand a lack of this support as top management's negative perception and distrust towards other organizations (Das and Teng, 1998). DMOs have no longer control over what is said online about the destination, but they have the opportunity to monitor and participate in the conversations themselves. DMOs oftentimes rely on outside providers such as web or technology support agencies in order to balance a DMO's lack of knowledge and resources in terms of man power and expertise (Marchiori et al., 2012).

To fully understand the drivers of innovation and adoption of web marketing and social media it is necessary to simultaneously investigate the effects of internal and external sources. Therefore, knowledge acquisition in terms of outsourcing and collaboration with third parties and an overall top management attitude to be open to innovation have been identified as elements that might affect the adoption of web marketing and social media activities and the related success of web marketing. Positive effects along the indicated paths in Figure 1 are hypothesized.

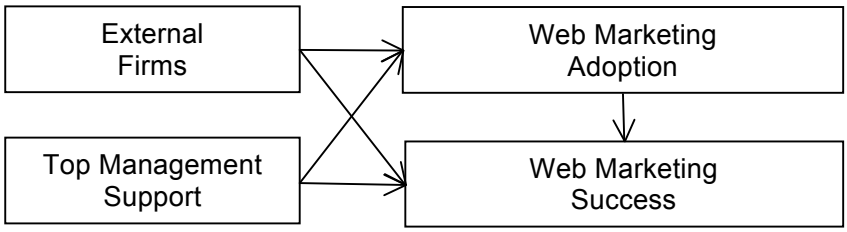

Figure 1, Research Model

METHODOLOGY

Web Marketing and Social Media Adoption

The Website Communication Model (WCM), later on renamed as Online Communication Model (OCM) (Cantoni and Tardini, 2010) was used for the identification of the web marketing activities as it allows to look at a website, and/or in general at the online communication, as a business communication act (Cantoni and Ceriani, 2007). The model provides a comprehensive structural description of operational areas that compose the online communication dynamics within an organization (with a particular focus on the online promotion). Based on the OCM (Cantoni and Tardini, 2010), the following three areas of expertise have been used for the investigation of the web marketing and social media adoption. Each operational area can be described as follows (Marchiori et al., 2012):

1. *eWord of Mouth activities (eWOM):* represents the listening and analysis of the online word of mouth about the destination. Related activities are the monitoring of the online conversations that take place mainly on social media. This listening activity is designed to obtain knowledge and know-how in order to manage a DMO's reputation and online presence (Marchiori and Cantoni, 2012).

2. *Promotion activities using search engines*: represent the monitoring of the organization's presence on search engines, and the activities related to the use of Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing in order to have the DMO's link on the top positions of search engines for relevant queries. The importance of the presence on the search engines results is related to the fact that search engines are the most efficient way to procure the first visit to the DMO site (Cantoni and Tardini, 2010; Fesenmaier et al., 2010).

3. *Website usages analysis:* represents the analysis of the actual users of a websites through the log files analysis or similar strategies. This activity allows the understanding of the audience of the websites: who are the users? Where do they come from? When? Through which links? Having searched which kind of keywords on search engines? Time of visiting? How often? After a promotional campaign or another event? etc. (Cantoni and Ceriani, 2007).

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from Swiss destination marketing offices. A pilot study among yielded 30 bureaus was used to fine tune the survey instrument. In early 2012 the survey was translated into French, German and Italian (and back translated for validity) and distributed electronically to all 225 DMO directors/CEOs. Two reminders were sent 6 days after the initial and the first reminder with a last call following two days after the second reminder. A total of 72 usable responses (32% response rate) were obtained. Respondents were first asked to identify organizational settings towards internal and inter-organizational knowledge acquisition. The survey included questions regarding organizational resources, including type of organization, the number of full time employees, budget and target market(s). The survey also included questions on leadership support for innovation/adoption, engagement with other organizations to learn about new trends and technologies and the integration of consumer comments on social media platforms into the development of new tourism offerings. Next, respondents were asked to provide information on their current use of the Internet and the adoption of eWOM activities. In particular, DMO directors were asked to identify if several web promotion operational areas were implemented or planned to be implemented and how useful and successful these efforts and their overall web marketing efforts are. Constructs were adopted from existing literature in organizational behaviour (Jerez-Gómez et al. 2005) and a prior case study among Swiss DMOs managers (Marchiori et al., 2012).

RESULTS

Characteristics of Swiss Destination Marketing Organizations

As can be seen on Table 1, the majority of the Swiss Destination Marketing Organizations in the sample operate at city level (50.6%), approximately one third operate at multiple city level (36.7%), 8.9% at Canton level and the remaining 3.8% at multiple canton level. Majority of the respondents are destination management organization (92.1%), and the remaining are marketing agency (2.3%), travel agency (1.1%), economic development organization (1.1%), convention and visitors bureau (1.1%). Most respondents indicated that their organizations are small, between 1 and 4 employees (46.5%), and another relevant part as

big organizations (23.2%). Majority of the tourism organizations have budgets of CHF 100,000 or less, few between CHF 100,001 - CHF 750,000 (4.5%), and just the 1.5% exceed the budget of CHF 3,000,000. About their web marketing approach, approximately one third declared to do not have dedicated resources (36.3%); the web marketing is part of their marketing department (33,8%); the collaboration with external (web) agencies/company counts for 17.5%. Those that have a dedicated web marketing department account for 8.8%, while another 3.8% completely outsourced the web marketing activities.

Table 1. Characteristics of Swiss Destination Marketing Organizations

Type	%	**Area represented**	%
Destination marketing organization	92.1	City	50.6
Marketing agency	2.3	Multiple City	36.7
Travel agency	1.1	Canton	8.9
Economic development organization	1.1	Multiple Cantons	3.8
Convention and visitors bureau	1.1		
Other	2.7		
Full-time employees	%	**Annual budget**	%
None	12.5	CHF 100,000 or less	92.3
1 – 2	30.4	CHF 100,001 - CHF 250,000	1.5
3 – 4	16.1	CHF 250,001 - CHF 500,000	1.5
5 – 6	8.9	CHF 500,001 - CHF 750,000	1.5
7 – 9	5.4	CHF 750,001 - CHF 1,000,000	0.0
10 – 19	12.5	CHF 1,000,001 - CHF 2,000,000	0.0
20 – 49	10.7	CHF 3,000,001 - CHF 5,000,000	1.5
50 – 99	3.6	Does not apply	1.5
Approach to Web Marketing			%
We do not have dedicated resources.			36.3
It's part of our marketing department.			33.8
We work with external (web) agencies/company.			17.5
Dedicated web marketing department			8.8
Agency/company ownership			3.8

Web marketing activities usefulness and success

A series of multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to identify factors affecting the perceived usefulness and success of the web marketing activities. Table 2 shows the results for the usefulness and success of eWOM activities. Significant effects were identified for the perceived usefulness of eWOM on the interaction with virtual friends through social media websites and the support from top management, suggesting that DMOs are actively involved in the conversations with their customers online and top managers are crucial on the management of these eWOM activities. However, eWOM success is positively affected only by the monitoring of social media conversations about a destination implemented within the last 12 months. This suggests that staying on top of the public's opinions expressed online enables DMOs to gauge if the destination is perceived as desired by marketers. No significant relationship with usefulness and success has been found for internal setting by top management and the involvement of external firms.

Usefulness and success of search engine activities (Table 3) are both positively affected by the monitoring of website's search result ranking adopted more than 12 months ago, indicating that knowing the destination's position in search results enables to gauge the success of the destination's strategies. Surprisingly, paid activities (e.g. search engine optimization, purchase of ad space in search engines), monitoring of competitors' online performances, and the analysis of

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis for eWOM Activities Usefulness and Success

Independent Variables	eWOM Activities Usefulness	eWOM Activities Success
Within the last 12 months *- eWord-of-Mouth Activities*		
We monitor social media for conversations about our destination.	n.s.	.571***
We participate in conversations about our destination.	n.s.	n.s.
We interact with our virtual friends through social media websites.	n.s.	n.s.
We monitor what others post about our destination.	n.s.	n.s.
Findings from social media conversations are used to improve our web promotion strategy.	n.s.	n.s.
More than 12 months ago *- eWord-of-Mouth Activities*		n.s.
We monitor social media for conversations about our destination.	n.s.	n.s.
We participate in conversations about our destination.	n.s.	n.s.
We interact with our virtual friends through social media websites.	.797***	n.s.
We monitor what others post about our destination.	n.s.	n.s.
Findings from social media conversations are used to improve our web promotion strategy.	n.s.	n.s.
Top Management Support (5-item mean)	.565***	n.s.
Knowledge from External firms	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services are used in initial service design and development stages.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services participate with our staff in service project teams.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services have major influence on the design of new/improved services.	n.s.	n.s.
Model R^2	.298	.638
F-value	1.092	2.396
p- Value	.004	.039

Beta coefficients are shown throughout.
*$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.05$.

keywords used to search for a destination, have no significant relationships with usefulness and success.

Table 4 displays the results for regression analyses on website usage analysis. Usefulness is positively affected by top management's openness, indicating that the use of website stats is driven by and maybe also interpreted by leadership. Success of website usage analysis is positively affected by paid click through from advertising implemented more than12 months ago, but negatively affected by the analysis of repeat visitation (also implemented more than 12 months ago). This suggests, that DMOs are paying for increased site visits, but do not achieve expected numbers of return visits.

Web marketing success

Multiple regression analysis were used to identify the effect of web marketing activities, and the role of the top management external agencies on the overall web marketing success of Swiss DMOs. As can be seen in Table 5, web marketing success is driven by eWOM and search engine monitoring activities ($p \leq 0.05$). Related to this result is the role of monitoring the "Repeat visitation" from DMOs website, which indicates that this activity is still an active indicator for accessing the performance of DMOs' web activities. Interestingly, paid activities (e.g. search engine optimization and the related analysis through click from paid advertisements, and the analysis of the visitors' country of origin) have a negative significant effect, suggesting a change of direction on the perception of success given by a financial investment.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis for Search Engine Activities Usefulness and Success

Independent Variables	Search Engine Activities Usefulness	Search Engine Activities Success
Within the last 12 months *- Search Engine Activities*		
Search Engine Optimization	n.s.	n.s.
Monitoring our website's search result ranking	n.s.	n.s.
Monitoring competitors' website search result rankings	n.s.	n.s.
Analyzing keywords used to search for our destination	n.s.	n.s.
Purchase of ad space (e.g. Google Adwords) in search engines	n.s.	n.s.
More than 12 months ago *- Search Engine Activities*		
Search Engine Optimization	n.s.	n.s.
Monitoring our website's search result ranking	0.676***	0.432**
Monitoring competitors' website search result rankings	n.s.	n.s.
Analyzing keywords used to search for our destination	n.s.	n.s.
Purchase of ad space (e.g. Google Adwords) in search engines	n.s.	n.s.
Top Management Support (5-item mean)	n.s.	n.s.
Knowledge from External firms	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services are used in initial service design and development stages.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services participate with our staff in service project teams.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services have major influence on the design of new/improved services.	n.s.	n.s.
Model R^2	.541	.186
F-value	1.855	1.023
p- Value	.094	.008

Beta coefficients are shown throughout.
*$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.05$.

An interesting result is the role of the top management and external agencies in the management of web marketing activities. Results suggest that a major role of external agencies/services on the design of new/improved services contributes to web marketing success. Moreover, the role of the top management and the use of partners in initial service design and development stages, or the collaboration with the project teams, seem to limit ($p \leq 0.05$) perceived web marketing success. The lack of significant effects of online conversations participation, integration of social media conversations findings on web promotion strategy, and a competitors' online rankings monitoring, confirm that the monitoring of the online conversations and presence as the most relevant web marketing features for a web success. Looking at the main reasons why Swiss DMOs are not adopting web marketing activities, it is possible to argue some interpretation of these results: the lack of financial resources is the main reason (eWOM activities: 53.6%; followed by search engine activities 49.2% and usage analysis 39.0%). However, a lack of man power (eWOM activities: 28.6%; followed by eearch engine activities 26.2% and web usage analysis 26.8%), and the lack of knowledge (eWOM activities: 7.1%; search engine activities 9.8% and web usage analysis 14.6%) too represent relevant motivations which might justified the use of an external agency for balancing the need of expertise on the management of the web marketing activities.

Last, several DMOs, however, indicate that web marketing activities are not relevant to reach their target audiences: eWOM activities: 10.7%; Search Engine activities 14.8% and Usages Analysis 19.5%.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis for Web Usage Activities Usefulness and Success

Independent Variables	Web Usage Analysis Usefulness	Web Usage Analysis Success
Within the last 12 months - *Website Usage Activities*		
Page views	n.s.	n.s.
Time spent on webpages	n.s.	n.s.
Repeat visitation	n.s.	-.773*
Origin of visitors (by canton, country etc.)	n.s.	n.s.
Click through from paid advertisements	n.s.	.477**
More than 12 months ago - *Website Usage Activities*		
Page views	n.s.	n.s.
Time spent on webpages	n.s.	n.s.
Repeat visitation	n.s.	n.s.
Origin of visitors (by canton, country etc.)	n.s.	n.s.
Click through from paid advertisements	n.s.	n.s.
Top Management Support (5-item mean)	.412***	n.s.
Knowledge from External firms	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services are used in initial service design and development stages.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services participate with our staff in service project teams.	n.s.	n.s.
External agencies/services have major influence on the design of new/improved services.	n.s.	n.s.
Model R^2	.170	.297
F-value	6.351	6.338
p- Value	.017	.005

Beta coefficients are shown throughout.
*$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.05$.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Several important findings for destination marketers were found; first, Swiss DMOs that adopt web marketing activities find them useful and that they are applied successfully. In particular, monitoring the online conversations about their destination and the presence on the search engines seem to be the most relevant web features. Perceived success of the three web marketing activities is driven by both features implemented more than 12 months ago and also more recently. However, only a few selected web marketing activities actually have explanatory power. This suggests that Swiss DMOs tend to adopt new technologies, but find just a few of them to add value to their web marketing efforts. Overall, it appears that monitoring various aspects of web marketing adds value to the perceived overall web marketing success. Indeed, benchmarking activities over time and comparing oneself with others is a useful tool to gauge once success (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006). Last, external knowledge from business partners leads to overall web marketing success, and this suggests that partners are critical for DMOs web marketing success. Working with partners is valuable, if done "properly", which in the case of Swiss DMOs appears to be having external companies do their part, after the DMOs decided on the greater framework. This can explain why external partners are often used for technical assistance, but not to develop and manage the content. Future research should consider a further investigation on the tools and methods used for the monitoring of online conversations. Moreover, an analysis of the current types of reports provided by tourism related-agencies seems promising in order to understand if DMOs are receiving biased information from partners as they might use in-house solutions for a so-called "online presence analysis". Another promising future research will be the comparison with others countries in order to investigate potential cultural key factors on the management of the web marketing success.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Model of Overall Web Marketing Success

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable Overall Web Marketing Success
eWord-of-Mouth Activities	
We monitor social media for conversations about our destination.	2.369***
We participate in conversations about our destination.	n.s.
We interact with our virtual friends through social media websites.	n.s.
We monitor what others post about our destination.	n.s.
Findings from social media conversations are used to improve our web promotion strategy.	n.s.
Search Engine Activities	
Search Engine Optimization	-3.527***
Monitoring our website's search result ranking	2.548***
Monitoring competitors' website search result rankings	n.s.
Analyzing keywords used to search for our destination	2.581***
Purchase of ad space (e.g. Google Adwords) in search engines	n.s.
Website Usages Activities	
Page views	-
Time spent on webpages	-
Repeat visitation	1.051***
Origin of visitors (by canton, country etc.)	-1.594***
Click through from paid advertisements	-2.527***
Top Management Support	-1.388***
Knowledge from External firms	
External agencies/services are used in initial service design and development stages.	-1.088***
External agencies/services participate with our staff in service project teams.	-2.024***
External agencies/services have major influence on the design of new/improved services.	2.893***
Model R^2	0.990
F-value	11.929
p-Value	$p \leq 0.080$

Beta coefficients are shown throughout.
*$p \leq 0.001$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.05$.

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