Destination Online Communication: Why Less is Sometimes More

A Study of Online Communications of English Destinations

Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between website design and the website end-user experience of a vast number of English tourism destinations, both local and regional ones. Following recent research in the field, this paper evaluates destinations' online communication, based on the implemented website features and on the effectiveness of the communication itself, borrowing its research methodology from different domains. After content and functionality analysis, a user-experience, scenario-based investigation has been carried out, which demonstrated that complex websites do not always serve end-users' needs properly; in other words, website complexity is not directly related with good user experience. This research may help destination managers to foster their online communication if they have fewer content and functionalities but are better focused and clearly user-oriented.

Keywords: DMO online communication, Website Evaluation, Online Communication, Destination Management Systems

1. Introduction

The importance of online communication for tourism destination marketing and commerce has been acknowledged by several scholars in recent years (Buhalis, 2003; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2006). In fact, tourism is one of the domains in which the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has actually revolutionized the industry (Gretzel, Yuan & Fesenmaier, 2000). The intrinsic characteristics of tourism, such as its information intensity (Poon, 1993), has made it the ideal field for technology exploitation and evolution. Technology, especially the internet, enables fast information exchange between service

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providers and end-users, thus fully supporting tourism business models (Werthner & Klein, 1999). Private tourism companies, which are often Small and Medium Enterprises, are not the only beneficiaries of this technological (r)evolution in tourism (e.g. Inversini, Cantoni & Buhalis, 2009; Law & Jogaratnam, 2005). Tourism Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have also gained advantage from ICTs (Wang, 2008). According to Horan & Frew (2007), the advent of so-called Destination Management Systems (DMSs) has allowed destinations to better manage communication flows internally and marketing and selling flows externally (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2006) before eventually conducting market research. Thanks to DMSs, destinations are acting as communication hubs (Inversini & Cantoni, 2009), connecting internal stakeholders with the external world. Major destinations are increasingly shifting promotional budgets from previous predominant promotional channels (such as printed leaflets, fairs, etc.) to the online environment, producing complex websites with a variety of contents and functionalities that might serve prospective travellers, as well as a vast range of other stakeholders (Inversini, Brülhart & Cantoni, 2012). Destination managers are aware of the complexity of the online environment, but do not pay always enough attention to the experience of end-users accessing their website with a specific goal in a specific environment (ISO 9241-11).

This paper investigates the following two aspects of DMO websites: (i) the complexity of contents and functionalities of a number of English DMO websites and (ii) the user experience of prospective tourists that may access those websites. Results show that, in some of the considered cases, having less content and functionalities but being well-designed and user-oriented, might help by better serving online visitors/prospects.

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2. Literature Review

Tourism and ICT

The advent of ICTs in the tourism field has dramatically changed tourists' behaviour, allowing them to access directly a great amount of information and, consequently, increasing the number of possible choices and options (Buhalis & Law, 2008). According to (Buhalis, 2003), present-day tourists are more independent and sophisticated in their travel planning activities, using several channels and tools to identify, customize and purchase tourism products. These channels include, among others, online travel agencies, search engines, destination management systems, social networks and other web2.0 services, as well as price comparison sites and the sites of all tourism players. In the present information-overload era (e.g. Inversini et al., 2009), the most successful players are those continuously providing high quality information and identifying customers' needs (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Choi, Lehto, & Oleary, 2007). Nowadays, ICTs have a key role in determining the competitiveness of the tourism industry by providing tools to support effectively the development, management and distribution of offers on the global market, as well as interaction with consumers (Buhalis, 2003). Direct dialogue with customers, actual ones and prospects, is enabled in a cost-effective way by the internet, which assists tourism suppliers in the use of a wide range of online promotional activities to integrate, if not substitute, offline promotions (Inversini et al., 2012). As a matter of fact, as first acknowledged by Buhalis (1998), the internet is one of the most relevant technologies affecting the tourism sector. According to Cantoni and Tardini (2006), it has clear competitive advantage over other mass media regarding (i) multimedia (use of different types of media, such as text, audio, picture, and video), (ii) interaction (high level interactivity), (iii) persistence (information is archived easily and navigations are traceable), (iv) in-depth studies (online publishing) and (v) immediacy (information is easily updated). ICTs and the internet have deeply affected the way business is conducted in the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008); consequently, tourism businesses and

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organizations are putting increasing efforts into developing and improving their online presence and online communications with customers and prospects.

In this context, the issue of online information search (Jang, 2004) is attracting the interest of academics and practitioners as a major trend within the travel and tourism field (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). The main issue related with information search is the possibility of locating correct and relevant travel and tourism information in the so-called "online tourism domain" (Xiang, Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2008): the online space that can be accessed from the users' preferred gates to the internet: search engines. Within the overwhelming amount of web pages that can be retrieved in the online tourism domain, DMOs' websites play a key role in helping prospective travellers to locate correct, relevant and accurate pieces of information. Customers should use destinations' websites as information sources; therefore, they should be designed to match end-users' needs and expectations.

Destination Management Organizations

DMOs are increasingly using ICTs and exploiting the potential of the internet to facilitate users' experiences when considering the destination in the online environment (Gretzel, Fesenmaier & O'Leary, 2006). One of the key channels used by a DMO is its official website; (Choi et al., 2007); moreover, Wang (2008) states that DMOs use official destination websites to provide users with relevant information during the three phases of tourism goods' consumption and consequently promote the destination's image. However, in today's technology-driven society, just having a web presence is not enough (Wang, 2008). Successful websites appeal to visitors' emotions, needs and interests, offering to the end-user the possibility of understanding the key characteristics of the destination (Park & Gretzel, 2007). Besides users' need for quality information and the importance of effective interaction (Beldona & Cai, 2006), another factor DMOs must take into consideration is that information needs change through the vacation planning process, since it is very dynamic and deeply

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influenced by personal knowledge, personal features and tasks (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). According to (Gretzel et al., 2006), the tourist experience is characterized not only by a consumption phase, which is the real trip and experience at the destination, as with any other product or service, but also by extensive pre- and post-consumption phases as well. The pre-consumption phase is dedicated to the planning of the actual trip, while the post-consumption phase is dedicated to sharing and re-experiencing activities. It is therefore clear how the use of ICTs is extended to all the stages of the tourist experience. In this complex context, DMOs are vigorously working on their online communication (Wang, 2008), improving contents and functionalities to support consumers throughout the tourist experience, from information search and booking, to mobile technologies to be used *en route* and newsletters, forums and other sharing opportunities once the physical experience of the trip ends (Choi et al., 2007).

A recent case study by Inversini, Brüllart and Cantoni (2012), about the online communication of the Swiss Tourism Board, highlighted the complexity of the website for one of the most popular destinations in Europe, particularly describing the technological architecture and its evolution, but also the growth of the regional (i.e. Cantonal) destinations' commitment towards technologies. On the other side, by analysing the strategy reports of the destination, the shift that destinations are experiencing became clear; the promotional budget is being conveyed to the online environment in recognition of the media-convergence of the majority of marketing activities. What is clear from this case study is that DMOs' websites are not mere technological artefacts (e.g. Inversini, 2011), but complex communication tools, which impact on several levels – from destination management, to destination promotion and commercialization. The online channels allow tourism organizations and companies to engage consumers' interest and participation, as well as capture key information (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2006); moreover, websites' contents are crucial, since they highly influence users' perception of a company or, broadly, about a tourism destination (Choi et al., 2007). It is therefore not possible to consider websites only as technological tools, which are an exclusive responsibility of engineers

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(Geest, 2001). Websites are an essential part of a company's external and internal communication (e.g. Pan & Fesenmaier, 2000) and technical competencies alone are insufficient to achieve quality online communication (Geest, 2001); on the contrary, running a website means considering various dimensions and, consequently, employing several competencies and skills.

Cantoni and Tardini (2006) stated in their Website Communication Model (WCM) that a website can be considered as a cluster of (i) contents and services (the actual contents and functionalities); (ii) accessibility tools, which make those contents and services available (hardware, software and human computer interface); (iii) people who manage (people in charge of projecting, producing, maintaining, promoting, evaluating and improving the website, as well as interacting with users); (iv) users/clients (people accessing the website and enjoying its contents and services). It is noteworthy that the first two pillars are things, whilst the third and fourth refer to people. Project and evaluation are considered cross-pillars, indicating that WCM can be used for both the project and evaluation phases of a website. A last key element of the model is the context because it is not possible to consider the four pillars as isolated; it is necessary to study them as part of a context, of the external world, which influences and affects them.

Tourism Website Evaluation

Travel website evaluation studies have become extremely important to both industry practitioners and academic researchers through creation of a body of literature, which has been summarized and rationalized by different research papers (e.g. Ip, Law & Lee, 2011; Law, Qi & Buhalis, 2010; Morrison, Taylor & Douglas, 2004). These researches examine the issues of tourism website evaluation, categorizing the methodologies used into qualitative and quantitative evaluations (Law et al., 2010). Furthermore, a recent study by Ip et al. (2011) classified the studies into (i) evaluation by phases, based on functionality layers encountered by users while navigating a website; (ii) evaluation by features, based on analysis of website content, design and even content

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and design and (iii) evaluation by features and effectiveness, based on analysis of features and user satisfaction evaluation. One of the interesting aspects of the work by Ip et al. (2011) is that they overcome the distinction among qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodologies and provide a more convincing perspective on these studies. Lastly, a less recent but equally interesting research by Morrison et al. (2004) discussed the possible parameters and methodologies to be used while evaluating websites in the travel and tourism domain, presenting different experiences and case studies and conceptualizing the idea of applying economic concepts, such as the Balance Score Card, to website evaluation. This approach is proposed also by Stepchenkova, Tang, Jang, Kirilenko & Morrison, 2010), who evaluated Convention and Visitor Bureaus' websites based on spatial and structural patterns; subsequently, Lee & Morrison, (2010) used the Balanced Score Card method to evaluate hotel website performances. While proposing the BSC methodology, Morrison et al. (2004) also predicted that benchmarking activities would be a major approach for future tourism and hospitality website evaluation. The authors underline the fact that comparative analytical tools will be used increasingly in the field to check one or more websites against competitors in the same (or even in a different) market/domain (Law et al., 2010; Lee & Morrison, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that, to date, no researches have focused on this particular relationship between contents and functionalities and user experience in order to understand communicative and design issues; additionally, there are no studies focusing on the analysis of English Destination websites' online communication (Ip et al., 2011).

3. Research Design

The main objective of this research is to analyse English tourism destinations' online presence and capability to satisfy users' information and communication needs. Following recent research in the field (e.g. Law et al., 2010; Morrison et al., 2004), especially the one by Ip et al. (2011) that analysed Website Evaluation Studies in

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the Tourism and Hospitality field from 1996 to 2009. This research analyses destinations' online communication "by features and effectiveness" (Ip et al., 2011, p.253), underlining the website characteristics and peculiarities, harvesting and counting contents and functionalities (e.g. Luna-Nevarez & Hyman, 2012), as well as anticipating users' experience (Essawy, 2006). The methods used are a content analysis (content and functionality assessment, related to "evaluation by features") and a scenario-based expert evaluation (user satisfaction, "related to effectiveness"). Both methods have already been used successfully in the travel and tourism domain but no paper has yet mixed them in order to get insights on the relationship between website complexity and satisfying user experience.

Regarding previous research in the field, the work by Ip et al., (2011) on tourism website evaluation was considered a starting point due to its detailed review of evaluation methodologies and of their results. Furthermore, the work by Choi et al. (2007), as well as the work by Wang, (2008), were considered the basis for analysis of contents and functionalities, as well as analysis of user experience. The two different methods chosen to serve the analysis by features and effectiveness are presented here. The first is a common methodology analysis within the communication domain, already used in the online communication environment, namely content analysis (e.g. Inversini, 2011). The second is a methodology used in Human Computer Interaction (e.g. Dix, Finlay, Abowd & Beale, 2003) and Usability (e.g. Qi, Law & Buhalis, 2008; Triacca, Inversini & Bolchini, 2005), based on severity ranking (Nielsen, 1995) of users' scenarios (Carroll, 2000). It is worthy of mention here that usability assessment has been used previously in tourism as a strategy to assess destination websites (e.g. Essawy, 2006; Qi et al., 2008).

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3.1 Research Questions and Methods

In order to pursue the main research objective – to analyse English tourism destinations' online communication and capability to satisfy users' information and communication needs – two research questions have been elaborated:

- RQ1. *Is there an informative core, or, in other words, a well-defined set of contents and functionalities, which characterizes English Destinations' Websites?*
- RQ2. *Providing more contents and functionalities, does this mean offering a better user experience?*

As mentioned above, the methods used to investigate the research questions are: (i) content and functionality analysis and (ii) scenario-based evaluation.

<u>Content and Functionality Analysis</u>

Content and functionality analysis allows detection and mapping the contents and functionalities of a website and investigating its level of completeness (Cantoni, Fare, Bolchini, Inversini & Giulieri, 2007). It is performed using a content and functionality grid (e.g. Inversini, 2011), featuring a list of indicators, each one representing a single type of content or functionality, which is relevant for the domain. Starting from relevant literature review in the field (e.g. Choi et al., 2007; Wang, 2008), which highlighted a destination's website characteristics, peculiarities and functions, and from previous content analysis works in the field (Cantoni et al., 2007; Lizzi, Cantoni & Inversini, 2011), a bottom-up analysis grid was created to investigate destinations' online communication. The analysis grid was created iteratively by analysing all the websites in the sample. Each time a new type of content or functionality was found, it was added to the grid and the sample re-analysed.

For the present research, a content and functionality grid with 189 indicators has been developed and used. Indicators can be understood as types of content and/or of functionality, which compose the website (Cantoni

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et al., 2007). The analysis was carried out by visiting each website in the sample and filling the grid by acknowledging the presence or absence of an indicator. Value 1 was assigned when the indicator and, consequently, the piece of content/functionality associated with it, was available on the website; value 1 was also attributed when there was an external link giving that piece of information (e.g. a link to a weather forecast website showing directly the weather forecast at the landing point for the destination). Value 0 was assigned when the piece of information or the functionality was absent, or when the external link pointed to a generic website (e.g. for ticketing and timetables of the local bus company, the link points to the homepage of the bus company, where the user needs to perform a research to retrieve the desired piece of information).

The indicators were *ex-post* organized into six macro areas, which follow a communicative/narrative model. The macro areas were created once all the indicators were collected and indicators were grouped on a mutually exclusive principle. The areas are described below:

1. *There is a place:* the first macro area contains indicators related to geography, history and local culture of the destination. Indicators in this macro area give general introductory knowledge about the destination as a physical place.
2. *Where you can go and stay:* the second macro area presents indicators concerning the practical organization of a tourism experience, such as transportation, accommodation, itineraries and other practical information.
3. *And enjoy doing something:* the indicators in this macro area are related to attractions, eating and drinking and general entertainment offers.
4. *In a given period of time:* the fourth macro area concerns indicators related to events and seasonal tourism.

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5. *That's me (DMO),* which is suggesting you visit*:* the indicators contained in this macro area refer to contents about the DMO itself, including presentation, contacts and services.
6. *General services:* the last macro area contains indicators related to additional services and functionalities offered by the website, such as online shop, site map, FAQs, submission of reviews, website personalization, multilingualism, etc.

Indicators in a macro area were then sub-divided into 28 areas. Figure 1 shows the grid organization into (i) macro area: first level of granularity and narration; (ii) area: second level of granularity; (iii) indicator: last level of granularity; (iv) website to be analysed and (v) indicator labelled according to the presence/absence.

Macro Area (1)	Area (2)	Indicators (3)	visitbath.co.uk (4)	visitsouthport.com (4)
There is a place	In geography	Destination map	1	1
		Information about nature and wildlife	1	1
		Destination description	1	0
	With a story	Destination history	1	1
		Cultural/historical sites	1	0
		Monument/attraction symbol of the destination	1	0

(5)

Figure 1: Content and Functionality Grid Organization

Scenario-Based Evaluation

Scenario-based evaluation is a common technique used in Human Computer Interaction (e.g. Dix et al., 2004) for website design and evaluation. It describes how a website is likely to be used by specific users in specific situations; it is performed by completing actions that represent typical and/or relevant activities, taking into account the level of satisfaction of the user when interacting with the website (Brinck, Gergle & Wood, 2002;

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Carroll, 2000; Triacca et al., 2005). The evaluation is carried out through a severity rating for the scenario of use. According to Carroll (2000), scenarios are stories about users and their situations of use and they have three basic elements, which are (i) a setting or context of use, defining location and situation of use; (ii) agents or actors: a scenario can include different actors; and (iii) goals or objectives, often implying sub-goals or tasks. This research has adopted 17 user scenarios, each composed of (i) one user profile; (ii) one goal: the main objective of the user when navigating the website; and (iii) a set of tasks: operations to be accomplished in order to achieve the intended goal. A semi-structured interview with tourism expert Richard Veal, Managing Director of New Mind (UK market leader for DMO websites), allowed validation of 9 user profiles and 17 scenarios, which is considered realistic and able to cover most contents and functionalities that can be found on a tourism destination website.

The scenario-based evaluation was performed on a sample of websites. Starting from the results of the contents and functionalities' analysis, it was decided to select those destinations placed in the first 31 positions of the content and functionality ranking. Those websites have the highest presence of indicators; thus, from a frequency point of view, they are the most complete websites. Using the 31 websites with the highest number of indicators is enough to answer RQ2, which explores the relationship between a high number of contents/functionalities and user experience. The scenario-based evaluation was performed by navigating the website and completing – or attempting to complete – actions and tasks to reach the given goals. A severity rating scale (Nielsen, 1995) was adopted to rank scenarios. The possibility to perform a task is evaluated on a 3-point scale, where "0" was assigned when it was not possible to complete the given task; "0.5" was assigned when it was partially possible to complete the task and "1" was assigned when it was possible to complete the task. The feasibility of a goal derives from the feasibility of the tasks it comprises. The performance of a destination's website in the scenario-based evaluation depends on the performance of the destination itself in each scenario and, consequently, in each goal.

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Sample

The research sample was selected by moving from the English national DMO website (www.enjoyengland.com); among the whole list of promoted English destinations, only those having an official tourism website have been selected, a total of 120 destinations (January 2011). The sample includes 53 single city/town destinations (e.g. London, Chester, Bath, etc.) and 67 broader destinations, such as districts, counties and regions (e.g. Somerset, Devon, North East England, etc.). The analysis was performed in January-March 2011.

4. Results

Results of the Content and Functionality Analysis

The content and functionality analysis was performed to investigate the level of completeness of English destinations' official tourism websites and the frequency of relevant content and functionalities. The six macro areas of indicators were ranked according to the frequency of their indicators in the whole sample of 120 destinations.

The macro area named "And enjoy doing something", which comprises indicators related to tourist attractions, tourist activities and catering providers, achieved the top position, with 40.8% frequency within the sample. The macro area "There is a place", which includes indicators related to geography, history and local culture, closely follows with 40.3%. This is followed by the macro areas "In a given period of time" (40.0%), which pertains to events and seasonal tourism, and "Where you can go and stay" (39.2%), which is devoted to transportation, itineraries and accommodation. Indicators for contents about the DMO are contained in the "That's me" macro area, with 32.8% frequency; meanwhile, "General services" occupies last position, with 28.8%.

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Without considering macro areas, single indicators were ranked as follows (Table 1)

Indicator	Frequency %
Places of interests	99.2
List of attractions	99.2
Hotels	97.5
Attractions descriptions	97.5
List of accommodations	96.7
List of events	96.7
Activities and Things to do	95.8
Destination map	94.2
Destination description	93.3
Cultural/historical places	93.3

Table 1: Indicators frequency

The most frequent indicators in the macro area "There is a place" are "Destination map", "Destination description", "Cultural/historical places", "Main cities/places" and "Information about the natural environment", which are present in more than 92% of destinations' websites. Concerning the second macro area devoted to accommodation and travel to the destinations, the indicators listed as "Hotels", "List of accommodations", "Grading", "Apartments" and "Bed & Breakfast" are the ones most present, with more than 95% frequency.

Table 1 shows that the vast majority of websites in the sample (99%) use the indicators "Places of interests" and "List of attractions"; meanwhile, for events and seasonal tourism, the most frequent indicators are "List of events" (96.7%), "News/what's on", "Event search functionality", "Cultural events" and "List of venues" (93.3%). In the "That's me" macro area, which presents contents and functionalities about the DMO, "Contacts list", "Addresses and maps", "List of tourist offices", "Web contact" and "About us" were the most recurring indicators. Among the general services offered by websites, the "Internal search engine" is used by 73.3% of the websites, followed by "Accessibility statement", "Website map", "Guide download" and "Brochure download functionality".

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In the category User-Generated Content-related indicators, the indicator "Link to social network official page" (i.e. Facebook and/or Twitter) prevails with 41.7% of destinations presenting it; on the other hand, forums have no presence. The remaining indicators are less than 12%, with link to an Official YouTube channel and an official blog of the destination recording 11.7% and 10.8% respectively and indicators related to consumer reviews recorded as 4.2%.

Concerning the category online booking-related indicators, more than half of the destinations (57.5%) provide accommodation online booking functionality, while attractions and events' ticketing functionalities are used by 10% of the sample; tour ticketing and booking is provided by 8.3% of destinations. Text contents prevail in the category Multimedia-related indicators (68.3% for "Brochure download" and 70.8% for "Guide download"). Picture galleries and videos are used by 36.7% and 28.3% of destinations respectively, while the indicator related to audio contents in the form of Podcasts is present on 15% of studied websites. The least used indicator is "Virtual Tours", appearing in just 4.2% of the cases. Personalization-related indicators show in the top position indicator "Suggestions and guides for families", with 56.7% of destinations using it. It is followed by three indicators appearing in more than 40% of destinations' websites related to information for groups (41.7%), Meeting & Incentive tourism (43.3%) and disabled visitors (48.3%). The less common indicators are "Suggestions and guides for LGBT market" with 7.5% and "Studying here tips" for students, with 1.7%.

Results of the Scenario-Based Evaluation

As stated in the methodology, after the content and functionality classification was completed, the 31 highest-ranked websites were considered for the qualitative scenario-based evaluation. These 31 websites were checked against the scenarios, especially goals and tasks' feasibility, which are presented here.

Concerning the feasibility of goals, the goal with the highest feasibility in the sample is "Get maps and guides", with 87.7% of feasibility within the sample. It is observed that the Top 5 goals have a feasibility level higher

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than 70% within the sample. They are related to "Food and Drink" ("Find restaurants to eat typical Indian food", 71.0%), general information about the destination, such has destination overview, history and how to get there and move around (71.8%), attractions ("Obtain attraction information and book tickets", 75.2%) and accommodation ("Find and book a Hotel", 86.2%). The lowest position is occupied by the goal "Obtain information about surrounding areas", with 27.0% feasibility, suggesting a tendency in the online communication to consider a destination as an isolated entity or in competition with neighbouring destinations. This is preceded by the goal "Experience recall", with a feasibility of about 30% (Figure 2).

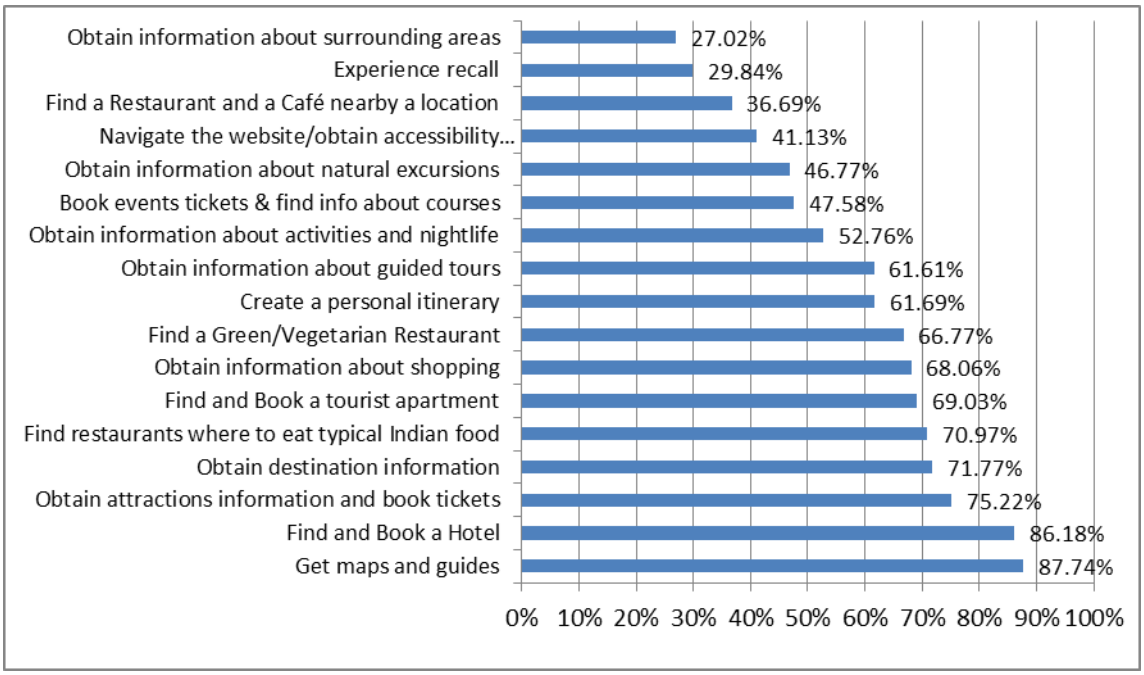

Figure 2: scenarios goals' ranking

It was then possible to identify the single tasks with the highest feasibility. The top position is shared by three tasks concerning retrieving basic information about accommodation ("Find hotel contact information"), events ("Find ticketing information") and activities ("Find venue contact information"); these 3 tasks can be fully completed in the whole sample of 31 destinations. Tasks related to listing and filtering products by type ("Find the list of the attractions", "Find attractions by type", "Find the list of the events", "Find cultural events") and

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gathering information about restaurants and accommodation ("Find hotel information", "Find contact information - restaurant"), have very high feasibility as well.

During the evaluation, it was impossible to perform several tasks in 29 destinations' websites out of 31. The tasks are mainly related to retrieving information about surrounding areas and excursions, finding restaurants' menus, special offers devoted to couples and downloading an events' calendar.

Discussion

The content and functionality analysis allowed ranking the destinations in the sample according to the level of completeness of their official tourist website. London was the most complete website in the sample, with 138 indicators out of 189, corresponding to 73.0%. The Top 5 ranked websites include four single city destinations (London, Blackpool, Brighton, and Bath) and one county (Lancashire). Two city destinations (Kenilworth and Rugby) shared the lowest position with less than 12% of the indicators (22 indicators out of 189). With regard to research question 1 (RQ1), it was possible to define an informative core based on three main issues, which are (i) destination attractiveness – places of interests, attractions, activities, things to do and events, cultural and historical places; (ii) destination accommodation facilities – list of accommodations; and (iii) mobility issues – destination map, destination descriptions, occurring in most websites (from 99.2% to 93.3%, threshold 90%).

Furthermore, as stated in the methodology section, the scenario-based evaluation was performed on a reduced sample of destinations, namely those ranked in the first 31 positions of the content and functionality analysis, which were the most complete in terms of content and functionality. Nevertheless, it was possible to compare the ranking of the scenario-based evaluation with the ranking of the content and functionality analysis (first 31 positions). The content and functionality analysis assessed the completeness of DMOs' websites in terms of offered information and functionalities, while the scenario-based evaluation verified whether those contents and functionalities are suited to the fulfilment of users' goals.

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The content and functionality analysis does not provide in itself a quality evaluation; therefore, a website that performs well in that analysis is not implicitly performing the same in the scenario-based evaluation, possibly because a content might be present but was not easily accessible, or a functionality might be not working properly. By comparing the results of the content and functionality analysis with those of the scenario-based valuation, it is possible to investigate the use destinations make of their online contents and functionalities. A different degree of importance was given to the scenarios starting from the work of Choi et al. (2007).

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Destination	C&F score	Rank	Scenario-based	Rank	Change in the ranking
London	50	1	36.24	3	(-)2
Blackpool	45.29	2	37.71	1	(+)1
Brighton	44.21	3	33.67	9	(-)6
Lancashire	42.03	4	33.82	8	(-)4
Bath	42.03	4	32.57	12	(-)8
Bristol	42.03	4	35.65	5	(-)1
Cornwall	41.67	7	30.25	18	(-)11
Devon	41.31	8	29.41	21	(-)13
Newcastle Gateshead	39.5	9	35.63	6	(+)3
Bournemouth	38.77	10	36.25	2	(+)8
Yorkshire	38.77	10	31.15	16	(-)6
Hampshire	36.96	12	25.51	28	(-)16
Winchester	36.23	13	31.87	14	(-)1
Windsor and Maidenhead	36.23	13	32.34	13	(=)
York	35.51	15	30.11	19	(-)4
Liverpool	34.79	16	33.23	10	(+)6
Peak District and Derbyshire	34.42	17	32.87	11	(+)6
North East England	34.06	18	31.16	15	(+)3
The English Riviera	34.06	18	25.51	29	(-)11
South East England	33.7	20	28.44	23	(-)3
Wiltshire	33.7	20	35.67	4	(+)16
Cambridge	33.7	20	33.93	7	(+)13
Middlesbrough	32.97	23	26.8	27	(-)4
Lincolnshire	32.97	23	28.25	24	(-)1
Leicestershire	32.97	23	28.55	22	(+)1
County Durham	32.25	26	27.15	26	(=)
Isle of Wight	31.52	27	25.43	30	(-)3
Tunbridge Wells	31.52	27	27.67	25	(+)2
Leeds	31.52	27	29.73	20	(+)7
Essex	31.52	27	30.78	17	(+)10
Birmingham	31.52	27	22.51	31	(-)4

Table 2: Comparison between Content and Functionality Analysis and Scenario Based User Experience analysis

Table 2 highlights the differences between the two rankings. In the Top 5, several changes occurred, with only Blackpool (moving to first position) and London (ranking third, with a loss of two positions) were able to confirm their leading position; the second and fourth positions are held respectively by Bournemouth – gaining eight positions – and Wiltshire, moving up sixteen positions. Bournemouth and Wiltshire provide significant

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examples of websites performing better in the scenario-based evaluation than other destinations' websites having an equal or even greater amount of indicators. Bournemouth had the same content and functionality score as Yorkshire, but Yorkshire lost six positions when evaluated for its website's capability to respond to users' goals and tasks. Meanwhile, Bournemouth gained eight positions; again, a website like Brighton's, even though it is more complete in terms of indicators than Bournemouth, registered a worse performance in the scenario-based evaluation.

It is possible to state that a DMO website providing a limited amount of information and functionalities can put effort into making those contents relevant, accessible and useful, in order to allow users to fulfil their online goals. Content and Functionality Analysis is merely a quantitative methodology. Two websites with the same amount of indicators do not necessarily provide the same type of contents and functionalities; a DMO website could provide contents that are more relevant for the fulfilment of goals than those provided by another website, consequently performing better in the scenario-based evaluation.

Destination managers should check not only the quantity of online contents they are providing to their online visitors, but also their quality, relevance and accessibility.

5. Conclusions

This study provides insights into destinations' online communication, both in terms of contents and functionalities that are available on destinations' websites and the user experience. It provides destination managers with two tools to investigate and evaluate their online communication strategy. Firstly, there is a quantitative tool – the content and functionality analysis – focusing on the quantity of information and services provided and measuring the "completeness" of a destination website; secondly, there is a more qualitative tool – the scenario-based evaluation – focusing on the quality and availability of the information and services.

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By performing the two analyses, destination managers are able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their websites in terms of quantity and quality of contents and functionalities. However, in terms of online communication, a large amount of information does not imply that those pieces of information are easily accessible for the end-users. At the same time, a website with few contents and functionalities could prove extremely useful for tourists needing specific information and are willing to perform specific tasks. To use an analogy, having more ingredients does not mean that a cake is better; it may just become too sophisticated. Sometimes, less – high quality – ingredients may provide a better recipe for a destination's online communication manager.

This paper contributes to the wide body of literature about destination website analysis and quality (Xie, Kerstetter, Mattila, Buzinde & Morais, 2012). This body of literature can be seen as framed in the wider website quality area (e.g. Hoffman & Novak, 2009), where the quality of information is seen as a means to increment website performances and usefulness (Kim & Niehm, 2009). Furthermore, this research adds a new element to the above-mentioned discussion: nowadays, when society is dominated by information (Webster, 2006) and (online) users are overwhelmed by information (Inversini et al., 2009), website designers as well as (in this case) destinations' managers should focus their attention on tailoring websites' content and functionalities for their users' needs.

Following the guiding idea of the book "The Paradox of Choice - Why More Is Less" (Schwartz, 2003), it is possible to argue that destination managers should focus more on the quality of the destination website's contents and functionalities more than on their quantity. It is demonstrated here that the best websites, in terms of contents and functionalities, do not always serve users' needs; on the other hand, websites using fewer elements demonstrated being very well designed and performed well in terms of served goals. Destination managers should improve their online communication starting from a user-driven, goal-oriented

reasoning and not from a pure technological reasoning. The use of scenarios and the involvement of end-users during the whole website production stages (Brink et al., 2002) might be a helpful starting point for tourism managers to orientate their communication towards their end-users and not to mirror (as often may be the case) their internal organization.

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