

AN INVESTIGATION INTO DESTINATION MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS WEBSITE EVALUATION
THEORY AND PRACTICE

NESRIN SOURAK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY

July 2015

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother and father for their ongoing love and support.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Damascus University in Syria for their full funded M.Sc. and Ph.D. scholarship in the UK.

Second, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Andrew J. Frew, for his support, encouragement, and advice throughout this thesis. I am also grateful to my second supervisor Dr. Violet Cuffy for her comments on my work. Their supervision made this journey a valuable experience for me personally and academically.

Third, I would also like to extend a debt of gratitude to the many people who participated in this research especially the members of the Delphi panel who offered continuous feedback over the entire process of the Delphi study, and the destination managers who kindly and willingly co-operated in the interviews and the online survey.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends, and people who I have met in QMU and Edinburgh for their love and help.

Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is an investigation into Destination Management Systems (DMS) website effectiveness and evaluation in the tourism domain from both academic and industry (destination management) perspectives. This thesis begins with a comprehensive review of the literature about theories, concepts and methods used for DMS website effectiveness evaluation. The future direction of DMS website evaluation in tourism and a conceptual framework that defines the contemporary theory versus practice of the DMS websites evaluation is elaborated.

The research employed first three rounds of Delphi study to generate an up-to-date definition and aims of DMS. The Delphi study also generated an up-to-date comprehensive set of dimensions and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. The research then employed structured interviews as well as online survey sent to forty-six official destination websites to review how industry is evaluating their DMS websites. What approaches they use in addition to the criteria and dimensions when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites is explored. This thesis also reviews additional aspects related to the in destination evaluation.

The findings of the Delphi study indicated that there is a rising emergence of social media as a new important component related to DMS. The findings also suggested additional aims to previously identified aims of the DMS. The new additional aims of DMS found in this research are: support sustainable destination management; empower and support tourism firms; enable collaboration at the destination; increase consumer satisfaction level and capture consumer data. Further findings also indicated compared with these established by previous researchers there are new additions to the evaluation dimensions of DMS websites proposed which are: sustainability, marketing, collaboration issues, and goals of the website. The findings of this thesis indicated that there is a congruence and consensus between academic experts and industry in terms of the most dimensions that are crucial for DMS websites evaluation. The findings, however, indicated that there is limited parallel between criteria identified with the Delphi study and those found and used by destination management practitioners. This thesis calls for additional research to develop a support system to ensure a focused involvement between academia and industry in the area of DMS website evaluation.

This thesis contributes to knowledge by generating an up-to-date and comprehensive set of dimensions and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website. This thesis also contributes to knowledge through the identification of the current dimensions, criteria, and evaluation approaches used by industry practitioners. This research adopted a strategy in presenting the literature review that enhanced the understanding of the DMS websites and their comprehensive evaluation in tourism. This research is one of the first studies in the tourism field that reviews and sheds light on and compares and contracts contemporary thinking on both academia and industry evaluation of DMS websites.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures xi.....	
List of Abbreviations	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Background	1
1.3 Justification for the Research.....	3
1.4 Research Area.....	6
1.4.1 DMS websites effectiveness	6
1.4.2 Horan and Frew (2010) effectiveness evaluation	6
1.4.3 DMS industry evaluation	7
1.5 Research Problem	7
1.6 Research Aims and Objectives	9
1.7 Scope of the Study	10
Chapter 2: Understanding DMS and Related Concepts.....	11
2.1 Introduction.....	11
2.2 Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)	11
2.3 Destination Management System (DMS)	12
2.4 Conclusion.....	18
Chapter 3: The Effectiveness of DMS Websites	19
3.1 Introduction.....	19

3.2	Complexity and Importance of Evaluating DMS Effectiveness	19
3.3	Website Evaluation	23
3.3.1	Websites layers	23
3.3.2	Website characteristics	24
3.3.3	Evaluation by characteristics and effectiveness	27
3.3.4	Other website evaluation techniques	28
3.4	Characteristics of a Standardized Tool for DMS Website Evaluation	32
3.5	Young Hoon and Mincheol (2010) Evaluation Methodology	36
3.6	Horan and Frew (2010) Evaluation Methodology	39
3.7	Practice (Industry) Based-Perspective	46
3.8	Conclusion	50
Chapter 4:	Methodology.....	51
4.1	Introduction.....	51
4.2	Research Aim and Objectives.....	51
4.3	Problem Definition	52
4.4	Research Schematic.....	54
4.5	Ontology and Epistemology	55
4.6	Theoretical Perspective	57
4.7	Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research.....	60
4.8	Selection of Research Methods	62
4.9	Research Design	63
4.9.1	Delphi Study	64
4.9.2	Destination Management Investigation	78
4.10	Quality of Research Design.....	83
4.11	Ethical considerations	84
4.12	Conclusion	85
Chapter 5:	Delphi Study Results-Academic Perspective.....	86
5.1	Introduction.....	86
5.2	Definition of Destination Management System (DMS)	87

5.2.1	Round I: Definition of DMS	87
5.2.2	Round II: Definition of DMS	88
5.2.3	Round III: Definition of DMS	90
5.3	Destination Management System Aims	94
5.3.1	Round I: Aims of a DMS	94
5.3.2	Round II: Aims of a DMS	95
5.3.3	Round III: Aims of a DMS	96
5.4	Destination Websites Effectiveness Dimensions.....	101
5.4.1	Round I: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions	101
5.4.2	Round II: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions	101
5.4.3	Round III: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions	102
5.5	Destination Websites Effectiveness Criteria.....	106
5.5.1	Round I: Destination management system effectiveness criteria	106
5.5.2	Round II: Destination management system effectiveness criteria	108
5.5.3	Round III: Destination management system effectiveness criteria	114
5.6	Delphi Study Conclusion.....	115
Chapter 6:	Online Survey Results-Industry Perspective	117
6.1	Introduction.....	117
6.2	Industry Evaluation Approaches	117
6.3	Destination Management Evaluation Criteria	118
6.4	Forms of Online Presence	120
6.5	Evaluation Criteria and Group or Business Areas	122
6.6	Factors which Influence the Evaluation Process	123
6.7	Frequency of Management Evaluation.....	124
6.8	Goals of Destination Websites	125
6.9	Types of Markets that Destinations are Seeking to Reach	127
6.10	Approaches of Learning the Good Practices of DMS	127
6.11	Destination Websites Promotion Tools.....	128
6.12	Reasons for Management for Evaluating their Websites	130
6.13	Results of Evaluation	130

6.14	Frequency of Updating the Evaluation Framework	131
6.15	Role in the Organization.....	132
6.16	Online Survey Conclusion	132
Chapter 7:	Research Discussion.....	134
7.1	Introduction.....	134
7.2	Delphi Study Discussion	134
7.2.1	Definition of a destination management system.....	135
7.2.2	Aims of a destination management system.....	137
7.2.3	Destination management system effectiveness dimensions	139
7.2.4	Destination management system effectiveness criteria.....	145
7.3	Online Survey Discussion	147
7.3.1	Criteria.....	148
7.3.2	Perspectives	149
7.3.3	Approach	151
7.3.4	Dimensions.....	152
7.3.5	Others factors	153
7.4	Critical Reflection between Theory and Practice	154
7.4.1	Hypothesis and prediction	156
7.4.2	Critical reflection	157
7.5	Conclusion.....	162
Chapter 8:	Conclusions	164
8.1	Introduction.....	164
8.2	Research Summary	164
8.3	Contributions of this Research.....	165
8.3.1	Theoretical contributions.....	166
1.1.1	Practical implications	168
8.4	Further Research.....	169
8.5	Limitation	170

References	171
Appendix I. Delphi Study Members.....	193
Appendix II. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants.....	194
Appendix III. Round I Questionnaire.....	196
Appendix IV. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants-Round	198
Appendix V. Round II Questionnaire	199
Appendix VI. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants-Round 3.....	208
Appendix VII. Round III Questionnaire	209
Appendix VIII. Information Sheet for Potential Participants	216
Appendix IX. Interviews.....	217
Appendix X. Online Questionnaire	241
Appendix XI. Management Survey Free Text Comments.....	250
Appendix XII. URLs of the participants	259

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Journals and Proceeding Used for the Literature Review	73
Table 4.2 Tourism Destination Interviews	81
Table 4.3 Sources of the Official Tourism Destination Websites	82
Table 5.1 Definition of a Destination Management System	87
Table 5.2 New Updated Definition Components	89
Table 5.3 Items on which the Participants Showed No Consensus	90
Table 5.4 Items on which the Participants Suggested Additions to the Definition	91
Table 5.5 Aims of a Destination Management System	94
Table 5.6 Proposed New Aims for DMS.....	96
Table 5.7 Items on which the Participants Showed No Consensus	97
Table 5.8 Proposed Evaluation Dimensions for DMS Statistics.....	102
Table 5.9 Dimensions on which the Participants Showed No Consensus	103
Table 5.10 Proposed Evaluation Criteria for DMS Websites Statistics	109
Table 5.11 DMS Website Effectiveness Criteria.....	114
Table 6.1 Evaluation Criteria and Business Areas	123
Table 6.2 DMS Evaluation Frequencies.....	125
Table 6.3 Reasons for Evaluating Destination Websites	130
Table 6.4 Action Taken from Evaluation Results.....	131
Table 6.5 Update of Evaluation Process Effectiveness	131
Table 6.6 Role Responsibly of the Respondents	132
Table 7.1 New Suggested DMS Evaluation Aims.....	138
Table 7.2 DMS Effectiveness Dimensions	139
Table 7.3 New Suggested Evaluation Dimensions.....	139
Table 7.4 DMS Effectiveness Criteria	146

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 The Main Sectors of a DMS	16
Figure 3.1 The Process for Effective Website Evaluation in the Tourism Industry ...	21
Figure 3.2 The Future Direction of Tourism Website Evaluation in Tourism	31
Figure 3.3 Horan and Frew Model (2010)	43
Figure 4.1 Problem Definition.....	53
Figure 4.2 Research Schematic.....	54
Figure 4.3 Research Design	63
Figure 4.4 The Delphi Process.....	70
Figure 4.5 Process Used to Select the Panellists.....	74
Figure 5.1 New Proposed Updated Definition Components	88
Figure 5.2 New Proposed Aims for DMS	95
Figure 5.3 New Additions to the Aims of DMS	97
Figure 5.4 Proposed Destination Management Systems Evaluation Dimensions..	101
Figure 5.5 New Additions to the DMS Dimensions.....	103
Figure 5.6 Proposed DMS Website Evaluation Criteria	108
Figure 6.1 Destination Management Evaluation Approaches.....	118
Figure 6.2 Destination Management Evaluation Criteria	119
Figure 6.3 Destination Online Presence Platforms.....	121
Figure 6.4 Factors Influencing the Evaluation Process	124
Figure 6.5 DMS Goals According to Destination Management.....	126
Figure 6.6 Types of Market Destination are Trying to Reach	127
Figure 6.7 Approaches by Destinations to Learn about Good Practice	128
Figure 6.8 DMS Promotion Tools.....	129
Figure 7.1 Evaluation Approach Reflection	157

List of Abbreviations

BSC	Balanced ScoreCard
DMO	Destination Management Organization
DMS	Destination Management System
e-MICA	e-Model of Internet Commerce Adoption
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IOIS	Inter-Organisational Information System
IS	Information Systems
IT	Information Technology
NTOs	National Tourism Organizations
OSNs	Online Social Networks
RTOs	Regional Tourism Organizations
SMTE	Small and Medium size Tourist Enterprises
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
WTO	World Tourism Organisation
WTOBC	World Tourism Organisation Business Council

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

1.1 Introduction

This research is about the evaluation of destination management systems (DMS) website effectiveness. The opening chapter aims to provide an overview of this research and an outline of this thesis. Firstly, it presents the background to the research; this will be followed by a review of gaps in literature and the research problem. The aims and objectives of the study, as well as how and why the research is conducted, will then be outlined. Finally, this chapter outlines the structure of the thesis and explains the core concepts used in this research.

1.2 Research Background

Tourism is one of the largest and most rapidly expanding industries in the world (Buhalis and Law 2008). It is a significant contributor to many national and regional economies. In many countries, tourism contributes significantly to gross domestic product (GDP), employment, economic growth, and infrastructure development; in some countries and regions, it even contributes to social development (Albadvi and Saddam 2012). Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products, or automobiles, and is expanding rapidly under the influence of increasing welfare, demographic changes, the increased mobility of populations, and the development of means of transportation (Boita et al. 2011).

Tourism provides intangible products that are difficult to evaluate prior to consumption and has been characterised as an information-intensive industry (Poon 1993; Maswera et al. 2007). Destination management systems (DMS) websites are important tools for marketing, promoting and creating a competitive advantage for tourist destinations (Wang and Russo 2007). Thus, the primary motivation for this research is to investigate the effectiveness of these systems. Another question followed is how to examine the effectiveness of DMS websites. This stimulated the researcher's interest in investigating the previous literature surrounding both "DMS websites" and "the effectiveness of DMS websites" in tourism, hoping to address these questions.

Reviewing related literature, helped to build a more robust research question, such as what are the dimensions and criteria that are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website?. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to generate a comprehensive set of dimensions and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website. In order to answer this question, this thesis reviews relevant literature in tourism and information systems journals. This helps to explore which evaluation techniques are used to measure DMS website effectiveness and which are the most effective measures.

Destination Management Systems (DMS) are systems that consolidate and distribute a comprehensive range of tourism products on a variety of channels and platforms. They usually cater for a specific region and support the activities of a destination management organization (DMO) within that region. DMS attempt to utilize a customer centric approach in order to manage and market the destination as a holistic entity. Typically, they provide strong destination related information, real-time reservations, destination management tools, and pay particular attention to supporting small and independent tourism suppliers (Horan and Frew 2007, p. 63).

However, a DMS website may not realize its full potential if it is not effectively developed and continually evaluated (Irani 2008). In today's complex business environment, DMOs need to evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS website to better utilize resources and, to ensure the system's effective performance (Rita 2000). The failure to understand the vital need for effectiveness evaluation can have undesirable consequences, such as inappropriate resource allocation, competitive disadvantage (Irani 2008) and, even, system failure (Ritchie and Ritchie 2002).

Despite its importance to the success of DMS applications, few studies have been published about the importance of effectiveness evaluation of DMS websites. Moreover, there is a lack of understanding of how destination management evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites. Therefore, this research intends to investigate DMS website evaluation in the tourism domain, from both academic and industry perspectives.

1.3 Justification for the Research

Destination Management Systems (DMS) are types of information systems and, particularly, web-based (Baggio 2003), inter-organizational information systems (Sheldon 1997). The ever-increasing use of these systems, as channels of distribution within the tourism industry, naturally leads to a situation where their effectiveness needs to be evaluated and justified. The evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites is critical for destination management to continuously improve and reach their true potential.

Reviewing the literature revealed that the majority of DMS websites' measurement techniques lack a universally accepted set of criteria, dimensions, weightings, tools, or techniques to be used in a comprehensive evaluation of DMS website effectiveness. Furthermore, many of these frameworks only focused on one aspect or one perspective when evaluating a website.

However, the Horan and Frew evaluation model, devised in 2010, is the most comprehensive evaluation model that exists in the literature for measuring the effectiveness of DMS websites. This comprehensive framework measures the DMS websites from a number of different approaches, such as customer, DMO and stakeholders, through a set of weighted dimensions and criteria. The finished framework is, made up of 12 critical dimensions of destination website effectiveness. It is broken down into 105 individual and actionable criteria which were evaluated using a total of 412 separate objective metrics.

This thesis continues to examine this comprehensive evaluation framework, rather than building a new evaluation framework for measuring the effectiveness of DMS website and to go further by exploring the industry perspectives of DMS websites evaluation.

To further validate the Horan-Frew model (2010), this study originally aimed to develop it and then apply it to the website of the Syrian tourism ministry. However, after developing the model and exploring how academic experts regard the model, as well as conducting some of the data required to apply it to Syrian tourism websites, the Syrian crisis started and there was a lack of tourist movement to Syria. Many attempts were made to find an alternative website to evaluate and re-validate the framework but, unfortunately, they were unsuccessful.

There is no study that focuses on how and what the industry adopts when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites. Therefore, this thesis achieves its second aim, by adding to the previous comprehensive evaluation framework and developing stakeholder views in terms of their DMS websites evaluation. The Horan and Frew model (2010) only focuses on the academic experts when generating their comprehensive set of criteria and dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS websites. Therefore, this thesis reviews and develops set of criteria and dimensions from stakeholders' management perspectives. This thesis examines the perspectives of academics and industrials to provide a broader picture of the evaluation of DMS websites. This will be a step towards a more comprehensive and enhanced evaluation framework, based not only on the academic perspectives but also on the industry perspectives.

The current study is based on a number of premises. First, the researcher acknowledges the multifarious challenges related to the link between scholars and practitioners. Second, the researcher recognizes that the best practice may indeed inhere within the destination itself, which may mean that there is no need for scholarly enquiry. On the contrary, as practice-based evidence, such knowledge may be shared and used by other destinations. Third, the current study is based on the philosophy of life-long learning and the premise that the main purpose of scholarly work is to provide new insights into the existing knowledge base by being published, so it provides the means for permanent learning and insights for both scholars and practitioners.

Discussions of the link between scholarly knowledge and practices are not new, yet they persist in fields related to business. Nonetheless, some scholars have questioned whether and why this link should exist (e.g. Lee and Greenley 2010), while others have perceived that a link between scholarship and practice is needed, and they have put forward the need to bridge the potential gap (e.g. Baker 2010). Evidence and belief are inextricably linked and that combined processes of reductive, inductive and hypothetico-deductive logic need to be used in a transparent manner to establish the credibility of an interpretation (Baker 2010). To uncover the uses of knowledge in practice, the current study focuses on specific concepts, such as DMS website evaluation dimensions, criteria, and approaches. These have been found to constitute essential elements of current DMS website practices and performance, as well as to be key contributors to destination management, customer loyalty and retention behaviour.

Therefore, this thesis presents a platform that evaluates and reviews contemporary thinking about the effective evaluation of DMS websites in the tourism domain. It will do this using academics for their theory-based perspectives and industry destination management for their practice-based perspectives.

To examine, the theory-based perspective, three rounds of Delphi questionnaires were employed to seek the consensus of experts regarding the most recent updated criteria, and dimensions that should be employed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. To investigate the practice-based perspective, structured interviews as well as online surveys were employed to collect data from destination management regarding the evaluation criteria, dimensions, approaches, and perspectives of DMS websites evaluation.

1.4 Research Area

1.4.1 DMS websites effectiveness

The definition of the effectiveness of DMS websites has been a topic of research and discussion. The measurement of the effectiveness of DMS websites is also an issue that has generated debate and research among academics and practitioners (Wang and Russo 2007; Estêvão et al. 2014; Sigala 2014).

DMS website effectiveness is concerned with those effects on an organization which result from the development and use of DMS websites (Chen and Sheldon 1997). These effects include: user satisfaction with DMS websites, performance of DMS websites, usage of DMS websites, and cost-benefit of DMS websites. DMS websites effectiveness has been defined as the accomplishment of objectives. Other definitions of DMS website effectiveness are embedded in the evaluation techniques. However, for the purpose of this study, the term effectiveness will be open to the interpretations of DMS stakeholders in order to be able to capture a comprehensive understanding and explicitly cover the whole range of suggested effectiveness factors as perceived by DMS stakeholders' groups. This section demonstrates the influence of multiple effectiveness conceptualization to the way in which the evaluation of effectiveness are studied in DMS research.

Researchers are in agreement that the evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites is a complex and multifaceted endeavour (Gretzel et al. 2006). The problem is deciding which DMS websites effectiveness measures to apply. In Chapter Three, individual measures of DMS websites effectiveness are discussed and examples are presented.

1.4.2 Horan and Frew (2010) effectiveness evaluation

The Horan and Frew (2010) evaluation methodology is the most comprehensive study of its kind to have taken place on DMS effectiveness in the tourism domain. While other evaluation studies remain important, they were often adopted from generic methods that lacked the focus and the subtleties of a model designed specifically for the needs of the tourism domain or for tourism's sub-domains (Law et al. 2010).

The evaluation framework was developed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques and was applied, specifically, to DMS websites.

Furthermore, previous studies often lacked the scope necessary to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of DMS websites. This is because they concentrated, for the most part, on too few dimensions, criteria, and perspectives, and, in too many cases, they failed to employ appropriate weightings.

The evaluation model, developed in the Horan and Frew (2010) study, dealt with all of these issues by integrating a comprehensive range of weighted dimensions and criteria, and using a diverse range of approaches and perspectives. Employing a range of approaches and perspectives provides a more complete picture of the effectiveness of a DMS website and it also helps to improve the robustness of the results obtained.

This thesis refines the components within the evaluation framework. The e-distribution arena is a very dynamic environment, with business goals changing constantly (Burby 2004). The criteria and dimensions within the Horan and Frew (2010) model need to be modified and restructured over time to reflect any changes. None of these factors were ever envisaged as remaining constant within the original model; rather, they were meant to act as a dynamic structure. They, therefore, need to be refined, updated, and maintained.

1.4.3 DMS industry evaluation

Recently, concerns over the gap between the theory of what people do and what people actually do have given rise to the 'practice' approach in the management literature. In this thesis, practice has been investigated through the tacit knowledge and practical consciousness of the destination management regarding the website evaluation dimensions, criteria, techniques, and perspectives. In this way, practical accounts of the adopted DMS effectiveness models for evaluation can also give rise to theoretical considerations.

1.5 Research Problem

By reviewing the literature it emerges that; firstly, the specific literature concerning the effectiveness of destination management systems (DMS) websites and its evaluation is limited.

Secondly, since 2010, there have been no attempts to develop a comprehensive weighted framework for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS.

Thirdly, the existing comprehensive studies for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS have not been validated and tested for longitudinal study. There has been no further research to refine or to check the validity of the comprehensive models.

Fourthly, there have been no attempts to review the industry evaluation of their destination management systems (DMS) websites.

These are the major gaps in contemporary literature about the effectiveness of destination management systems (DMS) websites. Therefore, further contributions to the literature are needed. The fundamental problem behind this research is the imperative need to review both contemporary academic and industry thinking on the evaluations of DMS websites .

Therefore, the research examines the most recent comprehensive framework designed to measure the effectiveness of DMS website evaluations. It investigates the current DMS website evaluation approaches adopted by destination management. This research is also concerned with other aspects related to the evaluation of DMS websites by destination management. This research examines how often each destination does such evaluating, and which criteria are influenced by which businesses. The research is also focussed on how the industry promotes its DMS websites, what the goals of its DMS websites are, and what types of market it is trying to reach.

Thus far, there is no empirical study that identifies gaps between industry practice and academic theory in the area of DMS website evaluations. This thesis will investigate this issue for the first time in research literature. To conclude, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) How has the evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites been explored by both academics and the destination management?
- (2) What are the recent dimensions and criteria that academic experts think should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS website?
- (3) What are the evaluation approaches, dimensions and criteria that the industry is actually adopting when they evaluate their own DMS websites?
- (4). Are there gaps between the academic theory and the industry practice in terms of the evaluation approaches, evaluation criteria and evaluation dimensions of DMS websites?

1.6 Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims to investigate the evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites from, both academic, and industry (destination management) perspectives. This study concludes by examining a comprehensive model for DMS website evaluation, and investigating the evaluation of DMS websites as accomplished by the destination management.

In light of this chapter's discussion of the research problem and the research questions, the following points summarize the main aims and objectives of this study.

The Aim of the study is:

To investigate contemporary thinking on DMS websites evaluation from both academic and destination management perspectives.

The Objectives of the study are:

1. To generate an up-to-date and comprehensive set of dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website.
2. To generate an up-to-date and comprehensive set of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website.
3. To identify the current dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website, as used by destination management.
4. To identify the current criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website, as used by destination management.
5. To identify the current evaluation approaches for evaluation the effectiveness of a DMS website, as used by destination management.
6. To compare the gap between the academic recommendations and actual destination management practices.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study involves an analysis of a three round of Delphi study to generate an up-to-date and comprehensive set of dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website. This study also involves an analysis of structured interviews, as well as an online survey designed to review evaluations of the effectiveness of DMS websites by the management of the destinations. Data has been collected from 46 official destination websites, including country, city and regional websites.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One has given an overview of the points that this thesis examines and describes the general background of the thesis. This chapter explores the relevance of the research; the research problems; and the aims and the objectives of the research.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three offers a literature review on relevant concepts to this study, such as an overview on the concepts of DMS, DMS effectiveness, evaluation techniques used to measure DMS effectiveness, and an overview of the Horan and Frew comprehensive evaluation framework (2010).

Chapter Four explores the methodological issues, including the ontology and the epistemology. It will also explain the research methods, including details on the research strategy, research design, data collection procedures, and the relevant data analysis techniques.

Chapter Five presents the results from the Delphi study, and proposes the most recent and updated dimensions and criteria that the expert panel believe should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS website.

Chapter Six presents the results from the structured interview and online survey. It identifies industry approaches to website evaluation, as well as key dimensions and criteria that are being adopted when they evaluate the effectiveness of their destination websites.

Chapter Seven highlights how the results from this research reflect, differs from and extends the existing knowledge of the evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the study, explores the limitations, and suggests some possible future research ideas created by this research.

Chapter 2: Understanding Destination Management Systems (DMS) and Related Concepts

2.1 Introduction

Destination Management Systems (DMS) are online systems that link tourism demand with tourism suppliers, and empower tourism destinations to distribute their products, thus enhancing the competitiveness of tourism destinations (Hall 2000). This chapter describes the background and concepts of DMS, in addition to the objectives, adoption and implementation of DMS. DMS business models, as well as components of DMS, are then reviewed. Before understanding DMS and its related concepts, this chapter first commences with the definition and aims of destination management organisations (DMOs).

2.2 Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)

Destination Management Organisations are defined by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as those organizations which are responsible for management and/or marketing of individual tourist destination (WTO 2007). They are responsible for the coordination and supporting of the activities of all the entities involved in the marketing of destinations (Collins and Buhalis 2003). DMOs are often public or public-private entities, and they are the main actor, fostering coordination amongst the variety of actors at the destination (Buhalis 2003).

DMOs perform five fundamental functions, i.e. they are:

- an “economic driver” generating new income, employment, and taxes contributing to a more diversified local economy;
- a “community marketer” communicating the most appropriate destination image, attractions, and facilities to selected visitor markets;
- an “industry coordinator” providing a clear focus and encouraging less industry fragmentation so as to share in the growing benefits of tourism;
- a “quasi-public representative” adding legitimacy for the industry and protection to individual and group visitors;
- a “builder of community pride” by enhancing quality of life and acting as the chief “flag carrier” for residents and visitors alike.

It is argued that in many cases, the majority of tasks which are the result of activities in the scope of the development of a competitive destination, are attributed to organizations of the DMO type (Pike and Page 2014). A review of scholarly sources also permits a determination of those administrative levels where DMOs appear:

- national tourism authorities (NTAs) or organizations (NTOs) (responsible for management and marketing of tourism at a national level);
- regional, provincial or state DMOs (RTOs) (responsible for the management and/or marketing of tourism in a geographic region defined for that purpose, sometimes but not always an administrative, or
- local government region such as a county, state or province) and local DMOs, (responsible for the management and/or marketing of tourism based on a smaller geographic area or city/town) (World Tourism Organisation 2004).

However, despite the fact that a considerable part of local, regional and national DMOs spend the largest portion of their budgets on costly promotional initiatives, often using mass media (e.g., television, radio or press advertisements), only a few of them develop marketing efforts by means of an efficient approach (Crouch 2007). Thus, as suggested by Kotler et al. (2003), the desire to develop a recognisable destination brand, presents a difficult marketing challenge to DMOs.

DMOs soon became aware of the potential relevance of the Internet, to optimising the efforts of destination marketing (Pike and Page 2014). They recognised the potential of the Internet to increase the opportunities of contact with consumers, at a substantially lower cost. Thus, in order to better fulfil their tasks, DMOs began to develop destination websites.

2.3 Destination Management System (DMS)

Destination Management Systems (DMSs) are online systems that support the activities of a DMO, for a given destination (Horan and Frew 2007). A DMS is an inter-organisational system that links the DMO to the whole range of destination suppliers (e.g., hotels and restaurants) and, at the same time, actively engages with the potential tourist demand, thus assisting DMOs to manage and coordinate the tourism development process (Chen and Sheldon 1997). DMSs are usually managed by destination management organisations (DMOs) (Estêvão et al. 2014).

The DMS concept is far from consensual. There is a lack of commonly agreed terms and definitions for DMSs, which is noticeable within a literature review of DMSs. The different arguments between researchers about DMS terms and definitions, contributes to the different perspectives on the DMS roles, aims and functions. This is in turn reflected in the ways in which these systems are referred to, such as tourist databases, visitor or tourist information systems, destination databases, destination information systems, destination marketing systems (DMSs), and destination management systems (Estêvão et al. 2014).

The main distinction between DMS and traditional DMO websites lies in the transactional dimension, particularly regarding transaction functionalities that are related to complementary general requirements, which are more likely to be found in DMSs (Estêvão et al. 2014). As far as the information and communication/relationship dimensions are concerned, the differences are not so clear. Rita (2000 p.2) recognises that a DMS normally includes booking and purchasing tools, encompassing a “desire to use computer and communication technologies to provide what has been called visibility and accessibility – an information and reservations approach.” In fact, a DMS is considered to be the IT infrastructure of a DMO, and it is developed in order to support a destination’s e-business activities (Sigala 2009).

Buhalis and Deimezi (2003) have argued that there is no exact interpretation of what these systems should offer. However, there are a number of generally agreed aspects related to DMS roles and features. For example: providing a comprehensive information database for the destination products and services; connecting tourists with tourism suppliers; and supporting the business of small and medium sized tourism enterprises (SMTE) (Sigala 2009). DMSs also increase tourism revenues, through providing online booking facilities that provide the means to better compete in the electronic market place (Egger and Buhalis 2008). According to Sigala (2009), the major role of a DMS is to act as an electronic intermediary, providing functionalities that are related to e-distribution, e-marketing and e-sales, for the whole destination and its tourism suppliers. Furthermore, a DMS can substantially contribute to sustainable goals through: supporting and fostering the economic development of a destination; promoting the socio-cultural development of a destination; and supporting environmental development (Sigala 2009).

Although DMSs are the most advanced web platforms available to DMOs, evidence clearly shows that, since their inception in the mid-1990s, only a few destinations have been able to successfully develop and implement such systems (Ndou and Petti 2007). This poor record, in terms of the success of DMS implementation, is mostly due to organisational, technological and managerial issues related to SMTEs, such as: a reluctance to use ICT; a lack of training; poor strategic management and marketing skills; unfavourable perceptions of the marketing and cost effectiveness of DMS; inter-organisational relationships (trust, communication and coordination) amongst SMTEs and the DMS operator; and a reluctance to pay commission for sales and/or participation in DMS (Estêvão et al. 2014).

Accordingly, there was a delay in the research conducted on DMSs, which is attributable to a number of reasons, such as: the lack of adequate and affordable technology at an earlier stage in the pre-Internet era; the relatively less intensive competition in the e-market place; the lack of IT expertise amongst tourism professionals; the domination of small and independent tourism enterprises around the world; and the conflicting interests of different players in the tourism industry. Researchers have noticed that most DMS developments, nowadays, are still facing many challenges, and that there is a higher rate of failure than success, in DMS application (Estêvão et al. 2014).

There are, however, two main business models that are now available, upon which DMOs can base their DMS development: a non-revenue-generating DMS (information only or non-commercial), and a revenue-generating DMS (fully transactional or commercial) (Estêvão et al. 2014). The need to develop a fully transactional DMS becomes crucial for the development of tourism destinations, not only for the competitiveness of the destination but also for the survival of the DMS (Estêvão et al. 2014). Collins and Buhalis (2003) have argued that once DMS is operated, funding – from the DMO, the responsibility on the DMS is then increased, to raise its revenue. Consequently, DMS applications face a high risk of failure, if they do not find revenues for their technology development and their potential competitiveness.

DMS is composed of four interrelated, functional components, identified by Wang and Russo (2007) as follows: a virtual information space (VIS), to provide comprehensive and quality information about the destination; a virtual communication space (VCS), to provide effective and constant communication with

consumers; a virtual transaction space (VTS), to enable the DMS to generate revenue; and a virtual relationship space (VRS), to facilitate appropriate and sustainable relationship-building mechanisms, with tourists.

The virtual information space (VIS) is a combination of functional information and motivational visuals that encourage the user to plan a trip to the destination, such as multimedia information (including text, photographs, videos, etc.), which supports both the functional-practical and the emotional-social informational needs of travellers (Wang and Russo 2007). The virtual communication space (VCS) is the potential media that can be used for enabling communication in the "Virtual Distribution Space" (e.g., call me back options, e-mail, blogs, newsletters, chat, forums, etc.). The virtual transaction space (VTS) is the tool that enables online bookings and transactions on the DMS website. This has major functionalities, such as a privacy policy and multiple payment options, e.g., multiple credit cards, PayPal, money transfer, debit cards, etc. The virtual relationship space (VRS) is an (e)-Customer Relationship Management (e-CRM) strategy that aims to build a long-term relationship with profitable customers; for example, loyalty schemes (Sigala and Sakallaris 2004).

Although DMS components include significant aspects of DMS, they cannot be considered as comprehensive, functional components. Wang and Russo (2007) overlooked important aspects of DMS, which need to be taken into account. They focused only on one facet of DMS relationships, the relation of a DMS to online tourists, ignoring other important relations, e.g., the relationship between a DMO and local tourism providers. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a broader view than that of Wang and Russo (2007). The UNTACD (2005), have argued for another set of DMS components, by categorising the functions of DMS according to different user groups. These components are the Extranet, the Intranet, and the public Internet, and these are located around a central DMS database:

1. A database, the core component of a DMS, is the starting point for providing and managing all information. A DMS should include content and graphics, research statistics and information, and an e-commerce module.
2. Three different websites, including an Intranet (for staff only), an Extranet (to link to tourism stakeholders), and a public website on the Internet (online customers), which should provide each group of potential customers with comprehensive and relevant information.

DMSs, according to the above functional components, are not only expected to maintain an Internet website that is open to everyone – namely, prospective visitors – but to also create different user profiles, aimed at both destination suppliers and intermediaries, and the DMO itself. Accordingly, a DMS need to operate an integration of systems of different stakeholders requires different access levels, according to the type of stakeholder, using web services (Figure 2.1). A DMS should act as a professional link between customers, tourism enterprises, and DMOs (Rita, 2000).

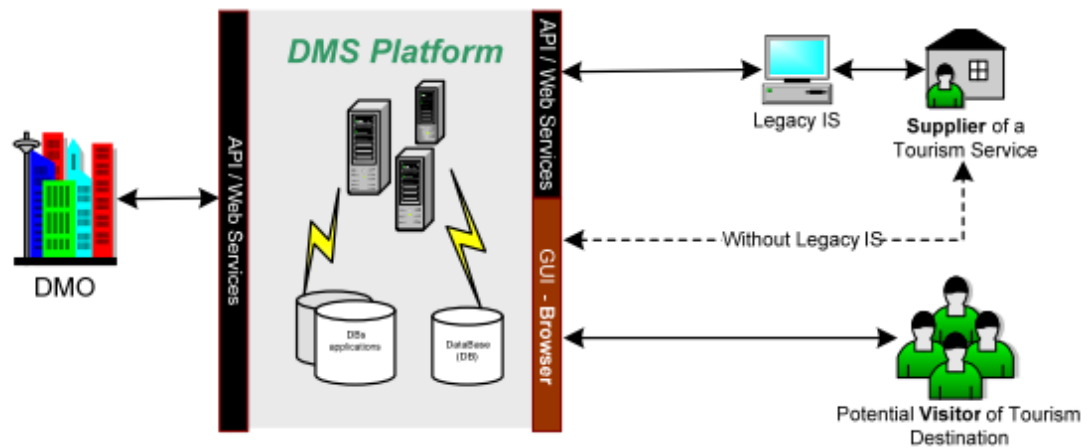


Figure 2.1 The Main Sectors of a DMS

Source: (Estêvão et al. 2014, p. 71, fig. 1)

Thus, a DMS should satisfy the needs of different stakeholders and increase their satisfaction level, by providing comprehensive and reliable information about the destination products and services, through a mechanism for effective communication between the primary stakeholders (customers, DMO and tourism providers) (Buhalis and Law 2008). In general, the stakeholders should be able to:

For DMOs:

- View all information added by other stakeholders and filter it.
- Add data about the characteristics of different tourism products.
- Add competitiveness indicators about tourism.
- Add aggregated data about the demand for the tourism destination.
- Add (or construct) online satisfaction surveys.

For Visitors:

- Search for information about general features and accessibility.
- Search for information about specific tourism products.
- Search for previous visitors' opinions of the destination.
- Book/Buy tourism services.
- Answer customer satisfaction surveys.
- Add comments about the destination.

For Suppliers:

- View competitiveness indicators about tourism.
- View relevant data on current and/or potential demand markets.
- Add data about the characteristics of products.
- Add data about the availability of tourism products.
- Assess data about the characteristics of product demands.

Generally, there are two different approaches to identifying destination stakeholders: narrow and broad views. An explanation for each view is presented, below. In his classic work, Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation’s purpose” (Freeman 1984 p.46). This definition implies a broad view that goes beyond those stakeholders who have purely formal ties with a corporation. Many researchers believe that this is a wide definition, which needs further classification. Clarkson (1995), for example, categorised stakeholders into primary and secondary groups. According to Clarkson (1995), a primary stakeholder group is “one without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive as a going concern,” while secondary groups of stakeholders are defined as those “who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival” (1995 p.106).

Generally, researchers who adopt a narrow view in identifying stakeholders, tend to focus on the primary groups of stakeholders, while researchers who adopt a wide view, usually investigate both primary and secondary stakeholder perspectives. This study argues that exploring both the primary and secondary stakeholder groups is important for understanding DMS effectiveness. Although they do not affect the immediate survival of the system, it is important to explore secondary stakeholder

perceptions of effectiveness, as well as those of the primary group. As stated by Freeman (2010 p.46), "To be an effective strategist you must deal with those groups that can affect you, while to be responsive (and effective in the long run) you must deal with those groups that you can affect."

Additionally, Sautter and Leisen (1999 p.326) have asserted that: "If tourism players proactively consider the interests of all other stakeholders, the industry as a whole stands to gain significant returns in the long term."

Reflecting on the above discussions about the different conceptualisations of DMS, this study argues that considering only one stakeholder when studying the effectiveness of DMS, is insufficient, as this is very likely to neglect important insights from other DMS stakeholders. As a result, there is a need to organise the destination products and services, meeting the needs of the multiple stakeholders and coordinating their relationships.

2.4 Conclusion

The development and operation of a DMS can substantially enhance the competitiveness of tourism destinations, particularly small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs). This chapter provided an overview of the context of DMSs, particularly: DMS definitions and objectives, the business models in use, and the development challenges. In addition, this chapter discussed the complex environment within which a DMS works (e.g., multiple local and international stakeholders). Alongside such discussions, the chapter highlighted the complexity of the effectiveness of DMS, and its evaluation. Being an inter-organisational information system (IOIS), a multi-stakeholder approach is a more holistic approach for studying DMS adoption and operations. The next chapter deals with the effectiveness of DMS websites, and how this has been measured in the current literature review.

Chapter 3: The Effectiveness of Destination Management Systems Websites

3.1 Introduction

As stated in chapter two, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) invest considerable amounts of money in the development of DMS websites, as part of their overall promotion efforts. With increasing pressure on their budgets, it becomes more important for these organisations to: assess the effectiveness of their DMS websites, evaluate the return on their investments; and gain feedback on necessary improvements. This chapter presents how DMS website evaluations are dealt with, in the literature. It highlights the complexity of this effectiveness, as well as the differences between the various DMS evaluation instruments. This chapter appraises the current limitations of the evaluation frameworks, and introduces a new conceptual framework that defines the contemporary theory versus practice of the DMS website evaluation.

3.2 Complexity and Importance of Evaluating DMS Effectiveness

DMS websites offer a business platform to promote products or services, and an avenue to generate revenue, by attracting more customers (Estêvão et al. 2014). The effective evaluation of websites has become a point of concern, for practitioners and researchers (Chiou et al. 2010; Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011; Bastida and Huan 2014; Del Vasto-Terrientes et al. 2015). The literature has revealed that, despite a number of attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of DMS websites, there is currently limited research on understanding the effectiveness of DMS usage, and its evaluation. The research on understanding DMS website evaluation in the complex context of DMS, is difficult, but vital to the survival of DMS in the e-marketplace.

As discussed in chapter two, the DMS is a complex system because it is a web-based inter-organisational system, an information distribution channel that works with various local and international stakeholder groups (e.g., tourism suppliers, DMOs, online tourists, and intermediaries). The DMS also works on the World Wide Web, which provides an advantageous environment through the emergence of Internet technologies, as well as tougher competitiveness (e.g., other DMSs), and

online-based intermediaries such as Expedia and booking.com. If tourism suppliers fail to fully co-operate with the DMS, this undermines the comprehensiveness of the information that is available to consumers. The difficulty in understanding the factors that influence the effectiveness of DMS websites, is due to the complexity of DMS contexts and characteristics (Wang and Fesenmaier 2006; Fernández-Cavia et al. 2014).

The effectiveness of a tourism-based website has been described in different ways, in previous studies. For example, effectiveness has been defined as the ability to meet pre-specified objectives that can be measured by tangible outcomes (Morrison et al. 2004). Also, user satisfaction has been identified as an important factor in defining effectiveness (Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011). Furthermore, website characteristics, such as design, have been recognised as important indicators for the development of effective company websites. The effectiveness of a website is mentioned in previous literature as being necessary, because of its costs (i.e., setup and maintenance costs) (Tierney 2000). This implies that the effectiveness is as important as the design of a website, and all of these processes begin with the evaluation of a website. Supporting the function of the DMS, this study argues that the effectiveness of a website can be understood as a communication channel, whereby effective communication has a clearly stated purpose that should be understood by both the creator and the audience. Young Hoon and Mincheol (2010) have explained the process for an effective website evaluation and its maintenance, as follows (Figure 3.1).

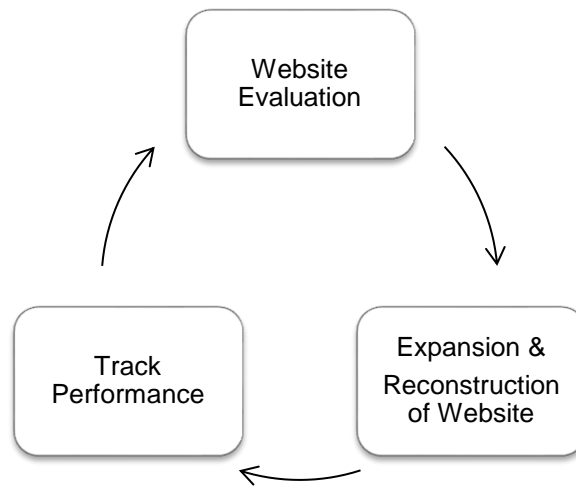


Figure 3.1 The Process for Effective Website Evaluation in the Tourism Industry

Source: (Young Hoon and Mincheol. 2010, p. 677, fig. 1)

Website effectiveness has been evaluated in different ways, in a number of studies. However, according to Law et al. (2010), a universal definition of website performance, or a standardised guideline for performance evaluation, appears to be, as yet, in the development stage. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2006), has broadly characterised website evaluation as the act of determining a correct and comprehensive set of user requirements, which ensures that a website provides useful content that meets user expectations and sets usability goals.

Website evaluations grant strategic benefits, such as customer retention, a positive return on investment, and leadership amongst the competition (Zafiropoulos and Vrana 2006). Furthermore, website evaluation helps to maintain and increase businesses' online presence and competitiveness in the marketplace (Panagopoulos et al. 2011). In addition, evaluations help organisations to: track the performance of their websites over a period of time; facilitate continuous improvements; and compare their own website's performance against competitors and industry peers (Morrison et al. 2004). Website evaluations have a significant impact on the success of online marketing activities (Wang 2008). The potential of a website may not be realised, if it is not effectively developed and continually evaluated (Ritchie and Ritchie 2002; Zafiropoulos and Vrana 2006; Irani 2008).

The importance of a website evaluation has been addressed by many scholars (e.g., Law et al. 2010; Fernández-Cavia et al 2013; Chen Kuo et al. 2014). Researchers create different evaluation models to measure websites, which makes it difficult for practitioners to understand what functions should be included on their websites, and how website performance can be accurately measured. Thus, it is important that DMOs evaluate their websites with a standard evaluation approach, in order to track the performance of their websites over a certain period of time.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the websites, we must first decide what aspects are important to measure, followed by a decision regarding the most appropriate method to measure these aspects (Law and Cheung 2005). The type of process that first focuses on collecting data on the evaluation factors, has an impact on the effectiveness process, and is also cost-effective (Law and Cheung 2005). This is the most important decision to be made during the evaluation process, as it will have a great impact on the methodology that is employed to assess the DMS websites (Mich et al. 2005).

It is vital to first identify what needs to be measured, because the website is an extraordinarily quantifiable environment, providing abundant opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of customer segmentation and loyalty (Sterne 2014). Accordingly, the website can be assessed by more precise rules (Butler 2002). However, within any website evaluation, there are countless variables that can be gathered and measured, but not all of these variables are worth measuring. The question that arises is, how do we identify these evaluation measures?

Researchers in the area of website evaluation, have argued that in order to identify these evaluation measures, and ensure that the evaluation measures are truly effective, they have to be linked to a company's key business goals, such as promotion, sales, conversion or customer retention (Chiou et al. 2010; Horan and Frew 2010). Therefore, any successful website evaluation should begin by setting clear and concise goals. This type of process requires businesses to apply the effort prior to the commencement of the analysis, in order to decide the goals and targets that must be reached (Ranganathan and Ganapathy 2002; Welling and White 2006). Consequently, this reduces the burden on the business, during and after the analysis. The next section discusses the evaluation methods and of website effectiveness, which have been discussed in previous studies.

3.3 Website Evaluation

Researchers undertake different approaches and methods to assess the effectiveness of websites, due to various backgrounds, the time of the research, the focus, and the degree of complexity (Schmidt et al. 2008; Chiou, et al. 2010). It is suggested that researchers choose the most appropriate approach, based on their research objectives, target markets, and stakeholders (Ip et al. 2011). According to these studies, website evaluations can be divided into the following categories.

3.3.1 Websites layers

Schmidt et al. (2008) point out that the more experience a company has in electronic commerce, the richer its website will be. This experience is referred to as website steps or layers, which means the basic framework for building the entire website. The Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (MICA) and the extended MICA (eMICA) approaches, are examples of evaluations that are based on the website layers, reducing the inherent difficulties of website evaluations (Schmidt et al. 2008).

The MICA model was originally developed for a study on the Australian metal fabrication industry (Burgess and Cooper 1998). MICA proposes that, in developing commercial websites, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) typically start by establishing a “presence” on the web, building its functionality over time, as their level of technical skills and expertise in the use of Internet technologies, increases. In addition, as the complexity of websites increases, the number of modules incorporated into the websites, will also increase.

MICA was developed to explain how business websites develop, in order to incorporate aspects of e-commerce. MICA consists of three stages and incorporates three levels of business processes (promotion, provision and processing); it provides a roadmap that indicates how far a business or industry sector has come along, in its development of e-commerce applications. Analyses of the different methods of classifying e-commerce websites, will identify their weaknesses. MICA does not involve much complexity, and it is easy to understand. It is used to more accurately reflect the level of maturity of e-commerce applications, from an industry perspective.

The eMICA concept was supported by the notions of Sumner and Klepper (1998), and Timmers (1998). The central tenet of the extended model is that, while businesses develop website functionality in stages, as proposed by the original

version of MICA, their complexity and functionality vary greatly between applications, and even between individual businesses within an industry sector. In line with this, the extended model proposes that a number of additional layers of complexity, ranging from very simple to highly sophisticated, exist within the main stages that have been identified. Increased levels of interaction are evident as websites progress through each of the stages/levels of the extended model (eMICA). The combined profile of complexity, functionality, and sophistication, is used to determine which phase or stage a website belongs to.

Doolin, et al. (2002) adopted eMICA to evaluate the level of website development of New Zealand's Regional Tourism Organizations, and found that most of these websites were at Stage 2 (the provision stage). Gupta et al. (2004) analysed small to medium enterprise (SME) Welsh tourism websites. They found that very few of these SME websites had exploited their full potential to achieve level 3, i.e., customer relationship management.

MICA makes it easy for industry practitioners (and researchers) to determine which layer their companies have reached, in order to try to achieve a higher level, in the future. This type of evaluation is useful and easy to use, for both practitioners and researchers, but it might be unable to keep pace with the rapid development of website applications. The basic premise of MICA is that e-commerce adoption follows an evolutionary process. This means that an organisation starts with a simple and static Internet presence, and then gradually moves to more complicated and integrated functions. However, although the adoption of e-commerce has both pre- and post-adoption events, MICA is inclined within the post-adoption process of Internet commerce, neglecting the pre-adoption factors that influence an organisation's intention to adopt e-commerce. Furthermore, the Internet offers a way for companies to diversify their business strategies; thus, many companies wish to incorporate their business with that of their suppliers, in order to achieve business integration (Schmidt et al. 2008). This means that there are possibilities that organisations might jump over to stages 2 or 3 of MICA. To conclude, the MICA evaluation fails to fully capture either diversification or integration.

3.3.2 Website characteristics

Other website evaluations did not adopt the layers evaluation approach, but based their evaluation on the presence of website features and characteristics. For

example, website content, website design, and the usability of the websites, are emphasised in this evaluation method.

Website content is defined as the combination of functional texts and appealing visuals that can attract users to the destination, and help destinations to develop successful communication strategies (Evans and King 1999). The content of a website is critical, as it directly affects visitor perceptions of the product or service on offer (Zafiroopoulos et al. 2004). The content also acts as a platform between tourism-related firms and their customers (Chung and Law 2003). If people used the Internet for its content, then they would only be likely to repeatedly visit a website if the website had an excellent quality of content (Chung and Law 2003). Content has a direct influence on the perceived image of the destination, creating a virtual experience for the potential customer (Gretzel et al. 2000).

Researchers (Law et al. 2010; Ip et al. 2010) have suggested that the content of tourism websites should be evaluated according to its usefulness, informativeness, accuracy, whether it is up-to-date, thoroughness, and thoroughness. Tweddle et al. (1998) suggest that the content of tourism websites should be evaluated according to the criteria of purpose, authority, design, readability, and implementation. Furthermore, scholars have asserted that effective content should provide significant value to visitors through its features, which have an essential purpose and value, such as a communication facility and multimedia (video, audio) (Rachman and Richins 1997).

Apart from the content, there is another common website characteristic that has frequently appeared in previous studies: website design (Nielsen 2000). Researchers have agreed that poorly designed websites are generally unattractive to customers (Perdue 2001). According to Cunliffe (2000 p.297), "poor website design will result in a loss of 50 percent of potential sales due to users being unable to find what they want, and a loss of 40 percent of potential repeat visits due to initial negative experience." Researchers have measured the effectiveness of website design by its speed, interactivity, visual presentation, accessibility, layout, navigation, and minimal download times (Chen and Sheldon 1997; Nielsen 1998; Ranganathan and Ganapathy 2002; Schmidt et al. 2008; Teichmann and Zins 2008).

The topic of website design is highly complex, and at its broadest level, could be considered to include information architecture, graphic design, search strategy, and navigability (O'Connor 2004). O'Connor states that:

Two ideologically opposite schools of thought have developed as to what is meant by good design. Supporters of the aesthetic school argue that the graphical/multimedia features of the web should be used to enhance the visitor experience. Functionalists, on the other hand, argue far less emphasis on visual design and more focus on content. At the most basic level of aesthetics is the simple text and hyperlink based page, sometimes supplemented by a logo or banner to add some graphical interest. Functionality and usability are the key design issues for the functionalist school of thought (O'Connor 2004, p.225).

Website usability has been widely measured as an indicator of website design. Travis (2003) defined website usability as the extent to which a specific website can be used by specific users, in order to achieve the specific goals of effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction, in a particular environment. Nielsen (2000) further proposed a definition of usability that examined whether the design of a website's interface can satisfy certain criteria, such as navigation, response time, and credibility. Furthermore, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2006 p.206) defined the perceived usefulness of the destination website, as the "degree to which websites' navigation, content and accessibility characteristics can help travellers satisfy their travel planning information needs." Qi et al. (2007) have evaluated the design of DMO websites, finding that many of those in China suffer from usability problems.

Most website evaluation studies in the literature have been comparative analyses of the content and/or design features of the websites (Douglas and Mills 2004; Law et al. 2010; Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011; Chen Kuo 2014). Although a number of evaluation methods allow website content and design to be analysed separately, a few studies investigate them at the same time (Douglas and Mills 2004; Han and Mills 2006). For example, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2004) evaluated the design and quality of Michigan's DMO websites, and rated the content elements most favourably. Similarly Lu et al. (2007) developed an index system for the evaluation of Chinese tourism websites, in terms of website design, content and effectiveness. They suggested that the country's tourism websites should improve the quality of the information they provide, in order to satisfy the needs of international tourists. Perdue (2001) developed a framework to investigate overall website quality, in the

resort setting. This framework included four factors, including the speed and quality of website accessibility, the ease of navigation, visual attractiveness and the quality of information content.

Evaluation by characteristics, provides no framework for a particular website evaluation; it is based only on the existence of website characteristics. This method of evaluation fails to provide sufficient evidence of construct validity, which completely limits the generalisation of its results. Furthermore, this kind of evaluation lacks a standard benchmarking approach for practitioners to adopt certain characteristics, as theoretical concepts might not be truly reflected by empirical measurement items (Schmidt et al. 2008). Companies should not simply determine the presence and effectiveness of website features, but should also consider which of those features have an impact on user satisfaction and consumer intentions to purchase, visit or reuse. To counteract the limitations of an evaluation by characteristics alone, a number of studies have introduced website effectiveness as part of their website evaluation.

3.3.3 Evaluation by characteristics and effectiveness

Schmidt et al. (2008) have suggested that research conducted using this method may have understood the construct of “website effectiveness” in different ways. This kind of evaluation effectiveness identifies which characteristics a website has, and also evaluates which factors affect consumer purchase behaviour and/or user satisfaction.

Several studies have considered consumer intentions to use or revisit a website, as a measure of website effectiveness. Bai et al. (2008) investigated tourist perceptions of website quality, customer satisfaction and purchase intentions, in the USA and China, finding that functionality and usability have a positive effect on satisfaction with travel websites and purchase intentions, in both countries. Han and Mills (2006) analysed consumer purchase behaviour on travel websites. The authors suggest that the owners of travel websites should provide more detailed information on destinations, attractions, accommodation, vacation packages and prices, as well as a better communication platform between customers and companies.

Customer satisfaction has been assessed in this category of website evaluation. Generally, website information quality, and system quality, are widely adopted by most models, in order to measure customer satisfaction (Weber and Roehl 1999).

For example, Kao, et al. (2005) developed an e-satisfaction model to evaluate national tourism organisation (NTO) websites in Singapore, amongst Taiwanese customers, through an online questionnaire available through the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), and 257 useable responses were collected. The findings demonstrated that information quality makes a greater contribution to satisfaction, than system quality.

Many of the studies that measured user satisfaction have carried out surveys to obtain their customers' opinions. These surveys are placed on the website, and respondents interact with the survey. Respondents usually access the online survey through a link in an email message or on the web page (Tierney 2000). Schonland and Williams (1996) conducted one of the first studies to employ web-based survey techniques, in order to evaluate the use of the Internet by travel services.

The approach of the survey method relies completely on the views of only one set of stakeholders (customers), in order to compile a list of dimensions and attributes, and it often neglects the views of other stakeholders. Furthermore, several researchers have acknowledged that there are other viable dimensions that could be included in a comprehensive website evaluation, and that future studies should expand the number of dimensions, in order to facilitate this (Morrison et al. 2004). Ascertaining whether certain website dimensions and attributes have the greatest impact on user satisfaction and consumer intentions to purchase, visit or reuse, is simply not adequate for an effective and comprehensive evaluation of the websites to accrue.

3.3.4 Other website evaluation techniques

Other techniques have been used for the evaluation of a website effectiveness. For example, a benchmark approach has been used to assess the evaluation of tourism websites. The benchmark approach is a management tool for website evaluation, comparison and improvement (Johnson and Misic 1999). The knowledge-sharing and motivational characteristics of this technique, mean that it is appropriate for the evaluation of tourism websites (Schegg et al. 2002). However, although this benchmark approach is simple in concept, managers have found it difficult to identify the operational quality characteristics of websites, when using this approach. This is because a definition of the term "better," in the context of system development, needs to be defined. Furthermore, the benchmark approach cannot identify the most relevant criteria for long-term success; it only improves a certain process of the website (Bauernfeind and Mitsche 2008).

To increase the applicability of evaluation frameworks, Chiou et al. (2010) condensed each study's dimensional factors into Park and Gretzel's (2007) 12 unified factors. Their review also showed that most studies conducted user-based surveys to examine a website, but that very few addressed strategic issues of Web site evaluation. Thus, they proposed a strategic framework as an internal evaluation to ensure consistency between web strategy and actual website presence, which was involved analysis of Web strategy and a hybrid approach that included evaluation during three transaction phases; the framework was designed to be applied by a specific Web site vis-à-vis its goals and objectives through a five-stage evaluation process. However, Flavian et al. (2009) mentioned that a website design should be addressed to simplicity and freedom of navigation provides clear, timely and accurate information in all its contents and an appearance that calls for the users' attention.

Bornhorst et al. (2010) confirmed that the tourism organisations held different (and conflicting) perceptions about the measures that should be used for evaluating DMO. The differences of stakeholders' perceptions were mainly contributed to two difficulties: first, the quantification of the economic benefits of DMO's activities to local business and the tourism community; and second, the provision of a proof of the causality between the DMO's collaborative practices and these economic benefits, as several other factors could have also positively or negatively affected the economic outcomes (e.g. the number of visitors to a destination).

Dickinger and Stangl (2011) suggested a theory-based alternative, formative measurement approach for website performance. The construct comprised eight dimensions. All these dimensions are system availability, ease of use, usefulness, navigational challenge, website design, content quality, trust and enjoyment. Their study developed a sound and parsimonious measure allowing the monitoring and benchmarking of traveler perceptions over time.

Sigala (2014) investigated various stakeholders' perceptions about the ways in which DMS performance should be measured. The study conducted a nation-wide survey for measuring the perceptions of various tourism DMS stakeholders in Greece about the importance of the roles that DMS should serve as well as the items that should be used for measuring the performance of these DMS' roles. The findings showed that the public and private stakeholders held different perceptions

about the roles of DMS as well as about the metrics that need to be used for evaluating DMS performance. The findings also showed that the perceptions that stakeholders hold about the roles of the DMS influence their perceptions about the performance evaluation of DMS.

Additional approaches used to evaluate tourism websites, include the use of automated tools to collect numerically measurable data; these tools then statistically analyse the collected data (Johnson et al. 2012). According to Ivory (2003), these automated tools are used to analyse patterns of usage in the server logs of the websites, and in traffic-based and time-based analyses. These assessment methods are, however, limited by their inability to trace user behaviour. An example of the automatic evaluation of travel websites is webLyzard (Wober et al. 2002), which analyses the textual components of a website's content, such as textual and graphical information, the number of language versions, and reservation and booking features. The limited amount of published research into the effectiveness of tourism websites, suggests that there is a need to move away from making strategic decisions based on simplistic metrics, such as hits and page views, and to move towards metrics that accurately relate to the key business goals (Tierney 2000). Furthermore, it will be a frustrating, time consuming, costly and futile exercise, to conduct this kind of evaluation without first understanding exactly which measurements are important to measure (Welling and White 2006).

Website evaluation approaches in existing studies, evaluated the effectiveness of the website either through the website layers method, or through the characteristics, user acceptance and user satisfaction methods. From a tactical point of view, these approaches were effective at assessing the features of the website and the user attitudes towards it, but they were not effective from a strategic viewpoint. In fact, many companies have experienced failure in the effectiveness of the website evaluation. This means that more in-depth evaluation approaches, providing a comprehensive methodology for evaluating destination websites with a focus on effectiveness, are required. The direction of the website evaluation is towards the construction of a standardised, repeatable, measurable, evaluation technique that is useable over the long-term, and can formulate the evaluation for a specific business and website (Horan 2010).

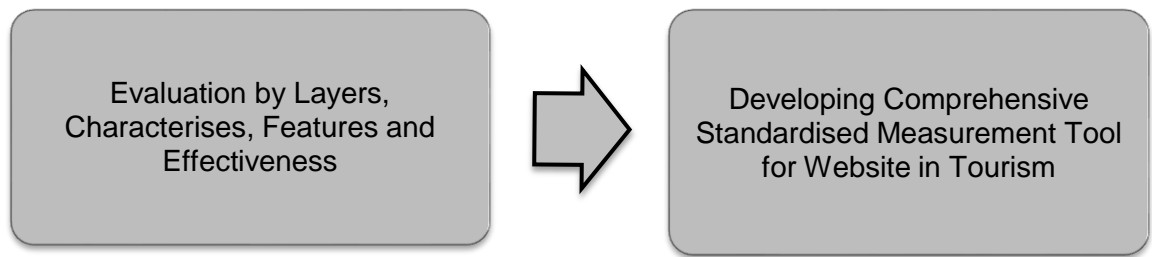


Figure 3.2 The Future Direction of Tourism Website Evaluation in Tourism

Small attempts have been made to construct a comprehensive, standardised measurement of website evaluation, within the tourism industry. Although there have been several studies to evaluate tourism websites in general, this has not been the case for individual websites. The previous studies used different methods, and the evaluation approach had changed and modified, depending on the subjects and aspects of the researchers, at each point in time. This implies that these studies have been approached by focusing on the subject of the website under investigation, rather than moving towards developing a standardised and repeatable measurement for evaluating tourism websites. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a standardised evaluation matrix that can be applied to tourism industries, according to each segment (i.e., size, revenue, region, sector, and evaluator). The question therefore arises: how can we develop a master, comprehensive instrument, for DMS website evaluations?

Previous research has paid little attention to the development of a comprehensive and standardised measurement of DMS website evaluations. The reason behind this might be that there is a difficulty in constructing a standardised set of dimensions and criteria, to evaluate the effectiveness of DMS websites (Kasavana 2002). For instance, Morrison, et al. (2004 p.246) concluded that: "It is impossible at this point to pinpoint the state of the art in website evaluation for tourism and hospitality. Additionally, practitioners and consultants are struggling to fill the void with a hodgepodge of solutions, none of which provide comprehensive website evaluations."

Although there have been many studies to evaluate tourism and hospitality websites in general, not for individual websites. Despite practical and theoretical approaches suggested or used for measuring the effectiveness of hospitality and tourism websites, it has been difficult to construct a standardized set of criteria to evaluate

website effectiveness. Both practitioners and academic researchers have explored methods of website evaluation. However, most website evaluations provide checklists or criteria to compare and rank them using indices which were developed only for that purpose.

There was little research to establish or construct a “comprehensive” and “standardized” measurement of website evaluation for tourism and hospitality. It is possible to build the different but standardized website evaluation indices depending on each characteristic of organization if the CSFs can be determined by experts in hospitality and tourism for each perspective with a critical literature review and decision of the size of hospitality or tourism organizations; i.e. luxury, upscale, mid-scale, or economy hotels and CVBs of the city which have a small, medium, or large populations.

It is believed that the results can help to identify effective and well-designed websites, and also provide tourism and hospitality industries and DMOs with an effective evaluation method they can use periodically to compare their websites with others and to improve their website. Additionally, this initial attempt to construct matrix for website evaluation can be extended to generate a comprehensive and applicable method.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to move away from the limited, descriptive and narrative findings, towards empirical verification. This can help to provide every DMO with an effective evaluation method, which they can use to assess and improve their websites. The attempt to construct a matrix for website evaluations, can be beneficial to extending and generating a comprehensive and applicable method, for every website (Chiou, et al. 2010; Horan 2010; Young Hoon and Mincheol 2010). Such a comprehensive evaluation method provides valuable insights to researchers and practitioners. Understanding the characteristics of such an evaluation framework matrix, is one of the fundamental steps towards its development.

3.4 Characteristics of a Standardized Tool for DMS Website Evaluation

Currently, there are no commonly accepted standard measurements for website success in the tourism industry (Gupta and Utkarsh 2014; Estêvão et al. 2014), leading most DMOs to simply track visits or measure basic forms of conversion

(online brochure requests, or actual travel after visiting the website). Although these kinds of evaluation measures are valuable to an extent, they give little insight into what aspects of the website have encouraged certain attitudes or behaviours, and how the web design, structure and content, could be improved. Scholars have not reached a consensus on the construct of a comprehensive and standardised website evaluation measurement, for website effectiveness.

Wang and Fesenmaier (2006) have suggested that the key ingredients to successful web-based destination marketing, include identifying, developing, and analysing the factors that can influence, or even shape, customer needs, thus suggesting that website development and evaluation efforts. Mena (2002) proposed that the success or failure of any website evaluation framework, is largely reliant on the quality and depth of its information (Mena 2002). Therefore, it is important to firstly identify the evaluation dimensions and criteria that need to be included in the evaluation framework (Law and Cheung 2005). The necessity of identifying checklists, or evaluation dimensions and criteria, is essential for the construction of a comprehensive and standardised evaluation framework.

Previous studies of website evaluations, provided checklists or criteria, in order to compare and rank them. The checklists or evaluation criteria factors in previous evaluation studies have been labelled in many ways, such as website evaluation, e-satisfaction, website quality, e-quality, e-loyalty, etc. (Park and Gretzel 2007; Gupta and Utkarsh 2014). The evaluation checklists or criteria have been adopted or modified from existing models or evaluation instruments, in order to evaluate selected websites. They have been identified according to their importance to the success of a website (Daniele and Frew 2008). In their study, Park and Gretzel (2007) adopted a qualitative meta-analysis methodology, to synthesise the diverse findings from previous studies, in order to find the commonly used website success factors. The evaluation factors that emerged from the analysis included a total of nine factors: information quality; ease of use; responsiveness; security/privacy; visual appearance; trust; interactivity; personalisation; and fulfilment.

The number of dimensions and criteria considered in the previous website evaluation studies, has varied dramatically (Johnson et al. 2012; Fernández-Cavia et al. 2013; Gupta and Utkarsh 2014; Del Vasto-Terrientes etl. 2015), making it difficult to compare the findings and identify factors that have consistently been used to evaluate websites. This situation has also led to a great deal of replication, and

little progress in understanding the key factors that should be included in website evaluation frameworks. Therefore, there is a need to identify a comprehensive, standardised set of dimensions and criteria for website evaluation, and house them in a comprehensive evaluation framework.

There is also a need to weight the identified dimensions and criteria, accordingly. Weightings are essential for two reasons; firstly, they are an indicator of the importance of individual features and areas; and secondly, they are a means to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a website's presence (Law and Cheung 2005). Dimensions and criteria should not be of equal importance (Lu et al. 2002). For instance, Bulter's (2000) study found that, in the airline industry, ease of use was regarded as a more important factor than content. Therefore, not all website dimensions and criteria have the same level of importance, and, so there is a definite need for the appropriate weighting to be attributed to them (Welling and White 2006).

Once the weighting of the dimensions and criteria have been determined within the identified evaluation framework, the next stage of a website evaluation process should be to decide upon how to measure these weighted evaluation dimensions and criteria. More often, previous website evaluation studies relied either on expert assessments or consumer opinions, to measure these identified evaluation dimensions and criteria. The information required to measure these effectiveness factors has often been taken from customers, either without their knowledge or consent (from the analysis of web server logs), or with their consent, through a variety of methods including direct feedback, online and offline surveys, and focus groups (Horan 2001; Young Hoon and Mincheol 2010). Although these methods are very useful for informing management of what is happening on the website, the nature of an effective evaluation methodology must be comprehensive. This means that the inclusion of a variety of stakeholder viewpoints in assessing the effectiveness, is essential (DeLone and McLean 2003). The stakeholders should include the customers, the suppliers, and the systems management. Unfortunately, the majority of previous studies lacks a comprehensive framework for website evaluations.

It is crucial that a comprehensive evaluation framework of this nature, which combines a set of weighted evaluation dimensions and criteria, should handle a statistical variability between the metrics, whilst remaining effective. The lack of a

robust, comprehensive methodology that houses a set of weighted dimensions, assessed by different stakeholders, is a critical limitation of the previous evaluation studies.

Another important issue that should be taken into consideration when developing a comprehensive evaluation framework, is what exactly the website performance should be measured against. Firstly, if we assess the dimensions and criteria against the optimum effectiveness, this means that each of them will be evaluated against the maximum performance that could be achieved. However, this could be suitable for some criteria, but not at all, for others. For example, in the case of website conversion, it is unrealistic to expect a website to achieve a 100% conversion rate. Therefore, it is illogical to set website aims that are too high. Secondly, if we benchmarked against peer, DMS websites, it would ancillary approach used once an internal performance measurement approach has already taken place, and it is beyond the scope of developing a standardised and comprehensive evaluation framework, once this evaluation is conducted. Thirdly, if we measure the website's performance on the specific goals set by the DMO, this would provide the most appropriate set of results for a specific website under investigation, and would be the best option for an effective evaluation to take place.

A standardised website measurement instrument, which addresses the website strategy as a guideline for developing websites, means that organisations will be able to measure how successful their website strategies are, with respect to their goals. The consistency between website strategy and website presence can help the website manager to measure how well the website satisfies the firm's goals and objectives, in the virtual marketplace.

Although it is possible to adopt standard syntactic models to evaluate destination websites, it is necessary to "personalise" the evaluation model, so that it takes into account the semantics of the website under assessment (Mich et al. 2005). There were very few attempts to construct such a standardised evaluation framework for websites, and the early attempts only started in 2010. The following section examines two of these attempts, which moved towards a comprehensive evaluation framework view of website evaluations.

3.5 Young Hoon and Mincheol (2010) Evaluation Methodology

Young Hoon and Mincheol's (2010) evaluation methodology was developed as an effective instrument for evaluating websites in a comprehensive manner, using the modified balanced scorecard (BSC) evaluation approach, and the analytical hierarchy process (AHP).

BSC is an example of an evaluation instrument that assesses website effectiveness. The BSC evaluation approach is a multidimensional approach that emphasises the links between the four perspectives (technical, marketing, customer, and internal business); each of these is evaluated through a set of critical success factors (CSFs), which are also based on a set of specific goals (Morrison et al.1999). The customer perspective relates to efforts to improve customer satisfaction, and is generally evaluated through four CSFs, such as user-friendliness, website attractiveness, the interactive functions of the website, and user security. The internal business processes relate to internal processes that are essential to achieving customer objectives, and are generally evaluated by three CSFs: ease of website maintenance; information on the organisation; and the profile of the organisation, and so on, for the other two perspectives.

The BSC approach is based on the premise that in any organisation, certain factors are critical to its success (Rockart 1979), and "what gets measured gets done" (Morrison et al. 2004). The BSC requires businesses to identify their critical success factors, for a strategic business perspective (Self 2004). In doing so, the BSC broadly informs management of what is wrong, and gives them a comprehensive view of the business, by integrating organisational performance factors into effective decisions (Kaplan and Norton 1992). Thus, the BSC approach offers a balance between the organisation's goals and objectives, as well as between the individual and a company's portfolios. The BSC approach is flexible enough to be customised, in order to suit the characteristics of specific industry sectors and gauge management effectiveness (Kaplan and Norton 1992).

Based on a modified BSC approach using the four previously mentioned perspectives, Young Hoon and Mincheol (2010) generated a set of 23 CSFs, which were developed through discussions with experts, and reviewing and examining previous research on business, hospitality, and tourism. This is a critical process for the construction of a standardised measurement tool for website evaluations,

because the identified CSFs can also be common evaluation factors for tourism website evaluations. For example, the technical perspective was evaluated by six CSFs: the currency of links; the effective use of hypertext markup language (HTML); browser capability; spell check; and the stability of the website. Ten critical success factors were used and evaluated for the marketing perspective: branding; tangibility of products and services; market segment and target marketing; positioning; marketing research and database marketing; relationship marketing; programming; packaging; partnerships; and marketing evaluation. Four CSFs were used to evaluate the customer perspective of websites: user-friendliness; website attractiveness; the interactive functions of the website; and user security. The internal perspective was evaluated through three CSFs: ease of website maintenance; information on the organisation; and the profile of the organisation.

After identifying the main CSFs, Young Hoon and Mincheol (2010) developed the final website evaluation instrument, through the analytical hierarchy process (AHP). AHP is a decision-making method that was developed by Saaty (1980) to calculate each factor, in order to compare and rank them, together and individually. AHP enables the prioritisation of each of the identified CSFs, and ranks them by their level of importance, with a consistency of measurement. It is a systematic measurement concerned with dominant priorities from pairwise comparisons of homogeneous or nonhomogeneous elements, through clustering elements. AHP compares and ranks each category in a hierarchical structure, including the goal (final object), the top criteria (the four modified BSC perspectives), and the sub-criteria (CSFs). A strength of AHP is its systematic process; thus, a theoretical foundation followed by its viability, usability, and applicability for a decision-making tool. AHP is composed of three main steps: (a) decomposition (structuring the decision problem); (b) comparative judgement (judgement of each criterion at hierarchical levels, through pairwise comparison); and (c) determination of priority (determination of the alternatives decision' weight). However, Young Hoon and Mincheol skipped the first step of AHP, because the modified BSC was used for the first step, and the hierarchical level already existed. As the BSC approach was used to design a standardised evaluation index, AHP was employed to determine the weight of each CSF.

The results of this evaluation study showed that customer perspectives had the highest weight, followed by marketing perspectives, technical perspectives, and internal perspectives. For the technical perspective, the stability of websites was

found to be the most important factor, followed by download time, the currency of links, browser compatibility, spell check, and the effective use of HTML. The results of the marketing perspective showed that the most significant factor was tangibility of products and services, whilst programming was rated as the least significant factor for the marketing perspective. For the internal perspective, ease of website maintenance was indicated as the most important factor, followed by information on the organisation, and the profile of the organisation. From the customer perspective, which was the most preferred perspective amongst the four perspectives, user security was the superior factor, followed by user-friendliness, website attractiveness, and the interactive functions of the website.

Young Hoon and Mincheol's (2010) evaluation methodology developed a multidimensional and weighted scale, using the modified BSC approach and AHP. By using these two methods, their study tried to develop standardised matrices for website evaluations, using a systematic process. The importance of each factor, with respect to contributing to the preferred component, was examined, and at the end, pairwise comparisons were conducted to obtain the relative importance of each CSF. Objectively, AHP assists in ranking the four perspectives, along with each of the CSFs. In terms of practical aspects, a website evaluation method was developed systematically and effectively, and has been a validated instrument that provides important factors for evaluating websites. However, although the evaluation methodology has several advantages, it also has several drawbacks.

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) framework has been frequently revised and extended in subsequent studies, as a valid instrument for website performance evaluations (Feng et al. 2003; Douglas and Mills 2004; So and Morrison 2004; Han and Mills 2006). However, it is a simplified, conceptual model for measuring website effectiveness, and it must be widened to include other dimensions and criteria (Perdue 2001). Morrison, et al. (2004 p.242) stated that, "...there are a plethora of perspectives and measures available, but a general lack of standards and measurement criteria." That is, the modified BSC must be adjusted and complemented, to provide a standardised approach for the evaluation of tourism websites, with those suggestions. It also uses "experts" to assess websites. The use of just one person (one perspective) to conduct an analysis, results in this approach being very subjective in nature. This approach ignores other perspectives, such as those of customers, suppliers and the management of the organisations involved (Chung and Law 2003).

Furthermore, although the BSC and AHP are, together, very applicable and rational ways of using multidimensional scales and determining weights through prioritising factors, there was no exact guideline on how experts were chosen for this study, and the results of the study might have been constructed, based on the opinions of the participating experts. Therefore, a more critical process is required for selecting the experts. Research has shown that a more sophisticated model should be employed, in order for a more in-depth assessment to occur (Self 2004). Young Hoon and Mincheol stated that, "...although the modified BSC was adopted from the literature review and modified again, it might not have constructed the process of the proposed model perfectly".

3.6 Horan and Frew (2010) Evaluation Methodology

Many previous studies that developed tools and methodologies for evaluating DMS websites were very much domain specific. It is important to focus on the on the phenomenon that is a DMS. In other words, there was no comprehensive evaluation model design specifically to assess the effectiveness of DMS based websites.

Complex problems are generally multi-dimensional in nature and website effectiveness is a complex fusion of many different elements and dimensions. Therefore, no one element or dimension can completely determine website effectiveness; a multi-dimensional approach is required for comprehensive evaluation to occur. However, there was no comprehensive evaluation model design specifically to assess the effectiveness of DMS based websites. Furthermore, while many of the previous studies that evaluate website effectiveness promote a multidimensional approach, the number and choice of dimensions used differ significantly across these studies.

The vast majority of previous studies evaluate DMS websites from only one perspective. These perspectives include the customers, the suppliers, the systems managements and the sponsor. The inclusion of a variety of stakeholder viewpoints is an important part of assessing the effectiveness of any system. By using an array of different techniques and perspectives it presents the tourism providers with a more complete picture of how their website is performing.

Most studies to date in the area of DMS website effectiveness have been conducted as once-off assessments. These methods only provide a snapshot of the website's effectiveness. To repeat this assessment at a later date would provide more insight

into the set of results. The very nature of the Web means that it is constantly evolving and in light of such dynamism and evolution, a snapshot approach, is simply inadequate.

Weightings are crucial to the overall balance of any evaluation framework (Park et al. 2007). While many of the previous studies have identified possible dimensions and criteria for inclusion in an evaluation framework, very few have made any attempts to weight them. Weightings are crucial to the overall balance of any evaluation framework (Park et al. 2007). Weightings are also essential because they are as an indicator of the importance of individual features and areas. Therefore, all dimensions and criteria should not be weighted equally because they are not of equal importance.

Many previous studies that developed tools and methodologies for evaluating DMS websites have not acknowledge the potential of benchmarking. The benchmark approach is a very useful tool as it provides operators with a good overview of what their strengths and weaknesses. In order for benchmarking to be successful a consensus must be met on the criteria, methods and tools to be used in order to evaluate DMS website effectiveness.

A study that considers various groups of stakeholder perspectives, and includes previous research contributions in this area, is needed. The previous evaluation studies cannot be considered comprehensive, for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS. They either lacked some stakeholder perspectives on effectiveness, or focused only on the function of DMS for understanding DMS effectiveness, thereby ignoring crucial factors that have been mentioned in prior research, for understanding or evaluating the effectiveness of DMS.

The Horan and Frew (2010) evaluation study describes a methodology for the development and evaluation of a comprehensive set of weighted dimensions and criteria for measuring the effectiveness of DMS based websites. Ultimately, from a DMS perspective, website effectiveness depends on how well a website performs with respect to the related business goals. This study was limited to assessing the impact of DMS effectiveness on the accommodation sector.

A comprehensive evaluation framework should include a number of perspectives and approaches in an attempt to provide a clearer picture of DMS effectiveness. Therefore, the purposes of Horan and Frew (2010) Evaluation Methodology was to identify the potential dimensions and criteria of effectiveness with respect to

destination websites, to weight these components, to incorporate these elements into a comprehensive framework and to subsequently test this model appropriately.

This evaluation began by employing a Delphi study to generate, validate and prioritise a comprehensive set of dimensions and criteria for measuring the effectiveness of a DMS. The Delphi study successfully identified a total of 12 dimensions and 105 criteria required to assess DMS based websites effectiveness. These components were incorporated into a comprehensive evaluation framework applied specifically to evaluate the effectiveness of a DMS based websites using a diverse range of approaches and perspectives. The framework provides DMS management with a comprehensive method to measure and manage the effectiveness of their Web presence by not only identifying areas of the website and website strategy that needed attention but also by providing advice and suggestions on how to improve these areas.

Prior to the commencement of any website assessment, the factors that contribute to the success of that website must be determined (Stockdale and Borovicka 2006). Therefore, Horan and Frew's (2010) evaluation methodology has first identified the dimensions and criteria that are critical when evaluating a DMS website. The methodology obtained a better set of results, thus concentrating on identifying the specific dimensions and criteria pertaining to the effectiveness of DMS websites.

A Delphi study has been employed in this evaluation methodology, to identify what needs to be measured in a DMS website effectiveness evaluation. The evaluation methodology first identified a total of 12 dimensions and 105 criteria, required to assess DMS website effectiveness. The Delphi study also weighted each of the dimensions and criteria, in accordance with their overall importance to DMS website effectiveness.

While many of the aforementioned studies were structured in such a way as to ensure that all evaluated areas made an equal contribution to the overall score (Zafiropoulos and Vrana 2006; Law et al. 2010), this study dealt with this issue differently, considering that not all dimensions and criteria are of equal importance; therefore, the study weighted them for the assessment of DMS website effectiveness. The process was critical to the entire evaluation methodology, as it provided exact weightings for each of the identified dimensions. The website content and design/navigation have been identified in this study, as the two most important

areas for evaluating DMS websites, with loyalty and retention as the least important areas.

The next stage of the process measured the dimensions and criteria identified in the Delphi process, by developing a comprehensive evaluation framework to house the findings from the exploratory phase of the research. The comprehensive nature of this framework assessed them from a number of different approaches, in order to capture the required data (customer, DMO and stakeholders). This process was needed, in order to calculate the actual dimensions and criteria.

The final evaluation framework is comprised of a set of metrics (weighted dimensions and criteria, with their “actual” weighting), for measuring the effectiveness of DMS websites. These components are incorporated into a comprehensive framework, which was then tested on the Visit Scotland website, in order to calculate the overall effectiveness of the website. The evaluation framework was comprised of 412 actionable, objective metrics, composed of the 12 identified critical dimensions of destination website effectiveness, which were broken down into 105 individual, actionable criteria. These metrics were calculated using inputs from a customer focus, an accommodation focus, a DMS management focus, and eMetric elements. Figure 3.3 provides an indication of how the actual model operates:

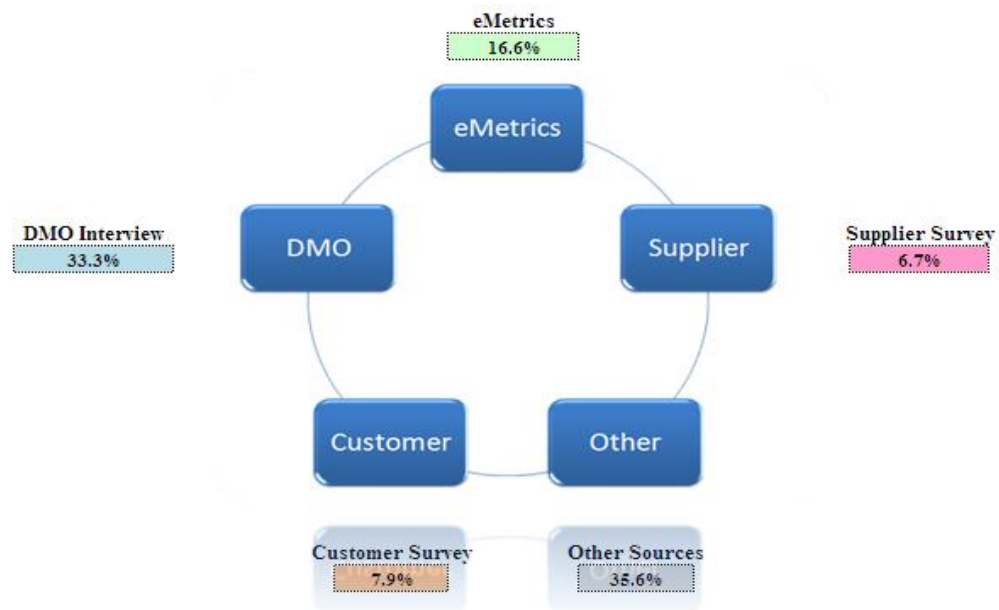


Figure 3.3 Horan and Frew Model (2010)

Horan and Frew's (2010) evaluation methodology moves towards a more holistic understanding of DMS effectiveness evaluations. The evaluation methodology was designed to deliver a multidimensional view of the key factors that shape DMS website effectiveness. Previous studies have used a variety of methods to collect required data, in order to measure dimensions and criteria including content analysis, user judgement, automated methods, and numerical computation. The comprehensive nature of this framework was able to assess DMS websites from a number of perspectives, such as customers, DMOs and stakeholders, in order to capture the required data.

From a DMO's perspective, the evaluation measures the website performance against the DMO's business goals. An evaluation methodology that measures a website's performance, based on the specific goals that have been established by the DMO, is one of the essential characteristics for developing a standardised and comprehensive evaluation methodology, for evaluating websites.

Although there could be limitations associated with the numerous evaluation metrics used within the evaluation methodology, there is no comprehensive evaluation model to specifically assess the effectiveness of DMS websites, despite the rise in the importance and complexity of DMS evaluations. The majority of previous studies utilised an over-simplistic content analysis approach that only focused on the

availability of certain factors, and that did not even attempt to assess their effectiveness (Park and Gretzel 2007). Most studies have been also conducted as one-off assessments, providing only a snapshot of the website's effectiveness (Morrison et al. 2004).

Due to the ability to benchmark this evaluation framework, in addition to the previous advantages of the evaluation, and because the website evaluations can be conducted in a longitudinal manner (Yeung and Law 2006), it is definitely worth considering Horan and Frew's (2010) evaluation methodology for either a longitudinal study, or for refining and modifying its components. The assessment within this evaluation methodology can be repeated at a later date, to provide more insight into the set of results.

It is essential for the future of website evaluation research, to keep refining the most recent and standardised evaluation approach, rather than simply applying the existing approaches to different datasets. Therefore, a study that continues the refinement of Horan and Frew's (2010) evaluation methodology, is needed. Accordingly, the first part of this thesis aims to continue refining the components of this methodology, as well as being a step towards confirming a comprehensive and standardised evaluation measurement for website evaluation in tourism literature.

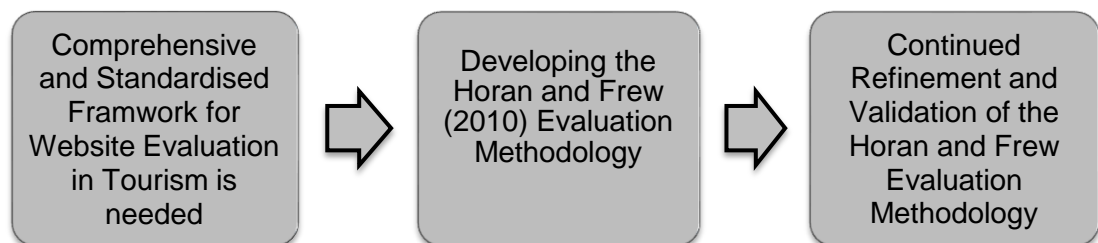


Figure 3.4 Towards Standardised Measurement for Website Evaluation

This thesis adopts Horan and Frew's (2010) evaluation methodology, and builds on it by continuing to extend and refine its dimensions and criteria. To achieve this requires identifying the most recent and updated criteria and dimensions to include in a comprehensive, standardised evaluation framework for DMS websites. A decision was made to consult academic experts who specialise in the field of tourism website evaluations, in order to ascertain their perspectives on the dimensions and criteria that should be adopted, when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS effectiveness evaluation. This integration helps to move away from the

existing gaps in previous evaluation approaches, towards a validated and refined comprehensive evaluation framework, for website evaluation in tourism.

Previous studies have based their evaluations on a wide variety of different dimensions and criteria (Burgess et al. 2011; Albadvi and Saddam 2012). The number of dimensions considered in the different studies within the literature, have varied significantly (Giannopoulos and Mavragani 2011; Gretzel et al. 2012; Johnson et al. 2012). Although, to some extent, these evaluation studies give little insight into what dimensions and criteria the DMS websites should be hindered, such as website content, website design, and website navigation (Goi 2012; Bastida and Huan 2014), there is currently a lack of common agreement regarding the exact dimensions for evaluating DMS websites from a number of different perspectives (Au Yeung and Law 2004; Zafiroopoulos and Vrana 2006; Giannopoulos and Mavragani 2011). Exactly how many dimensions should be employed by website evaluation frameworks is still being debated amongst researchers. It is very useful to have a specific set of dimensions and criteria in place, to evaluate tourism websites (O'Connor and Frew 2004b).

Determining the dimensions and criteria that constitute effectiveness, is essential for a comprehensive evaluation to be undertaken (Lu et al. 2002). Furthermore, when designing a DMS website evaluation framework, researchers need to have such agreed dimensions, in order to evaluate the aims of a DMS website from a number of different perspectives. Therefore, this thesis conducts a Delphi study in order to draw conclusions about the most recent dimensions and criteria that drive DMS website effectiveness. The Delphi study is an anonymous, group decision mechanism that aims to facilitate the establishment of a consensus, from qualified experts with a deep knowledge of website evaluation (Hicks 2009; Celikbas and Kocar 2010). Three rounds of questionnaires are sent to an identified expert of panels, to reach a final consensus (Powell 2003). The outcome of this study is shown in chapter five.

3.7 Practice (Industry) Based-Perspective

There is a lack of research that has investigated DMS websites and their effectiveness, from the destination perspective. The general studies on the effectiveness of DMS websites and its evaluation that have been conducted to investigate the DMS design and implementation as well as highlighted a number of critical factors that need to be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites (e.g., Chen and Sheldon 1997; Proll and Palkoska 2002; Park and Gretzel 2007). Other studies have focused on studying the effectiveness of DMS websites (Wober 2003; Li and Wang 2010), and proposed evaluation frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of DMS websites. In general, the frameworks for website evaluation lack a holistic view when studying website effectiveness, and also ignore a considerable number of factors that have been indicated as important to the effectiveness of a website.

Research has failed to investigate issues that are related to the performance of inter-organisational practices, such as the management perception of DMS effectiveness evaluation measures and approaches. It was claimed that some organisations have developed their own matrices or indices for website evaluation, theoretically and empirically (Roberts et al. 2014), yet, there is no published study that confirms this, and whether the evaluation approaches used by the DMS have been adopted or modified.

Scholars have implied that strong academic inquiries can be shared across firms and embedded in daily business practices (Jaworski 2011) through which managers with scholarly knowledge could achieve effective insights into various business aspects and have access to the information required to make appropriate decisions (Baba and HakemZadeh 2012). In other words, these scholars perceive that practitioners should apply knowledge in the practices conducted in an evidence-based culture. However, in reality, it appears that many management practitioners do not fully exploit the available knowledge in their decision making (Bartunek and Rynes 2014; Lilien 2011; Roberts et al. 2014).

Various studies on the link between scholarly knowledge and business practices have left several questions unanswered (e.g. Lilien 2011; Roberts et al. 2014). Studies that investigated the practical impact and use of scholarly knowledge have not specified their effects on particular fields (Ritala et al., 2013; Roberts et al.,

2014); for example, to the best of researcher knowledge, no empirical research has focussed on practitioners' use of scholarly knowledge related to DMS websites evaluation. In fact, Bartunek and Rynes (2014) conclude that empirical studies on scholarly knowledge use in general, are few. Nevertheless, the structural changes toward information, knowledge imply that current business practices should acknowledge and apply most up-to-date DMS websites evaluation approaches.

It was claimed that the effectiveness of DMS websites can be linked to organisational and managerial issues. It has been indicated that some of the factors that challenge the effectiveness of DMS websites implementation in the organisation. From these factors, for example, the adequate funding, and the knowledge and skills of the staff of the destination management. These factors can positively or negatively influence the effectiveness of DMS websites and accordingly, its evaluation within the organisation.

Some researchers indicate that financial problems are one of the main challenges facing DMS website development. There has been a prominent focus on DMS participation costs. Researchers have acknowledged that adequate funding is a critical factor for DMS website effectiveness (Collins and Buhalis 2003).

Researchers have suggested two solutions for the funding problems faced by public DMOs: private sector partnerships and e-booking facilities. Researchers have argued that private sector partnerships can be a good solution for DMS funding problems (Daniele and Frew 2008). The majority of previous research has argued for a partnership between the public and private sectors, in implementing DMS (Sheldon 1997; Ritchie and Ritchie 2002; Daniele and Frew 2008). The private sector partnership can bring considerable levels of technological expertise and investment power, since it is believed to be more responsive to market needs than the public sector (Buhalis and Deimezi 2003; Daniele and Frew 2008). Therefore, efficient partnership and cooperation between the public and private sectors, considering the different needs of stakeholders from the early stages of DMS implementation, are considered as critical effectiveness factors for DMS websites (Rita 2000; Proll and Palkoska 2002).

The reluctance to use ICT, the lack of IT knowledge and appropriate training, poor strategic management and marketing skills, and the short-term operational focus of managers, are also among the factors that influence the effectiveness of DMS websites (Daniele and Frew 2008; Sigala 2009). These factors have driven a

number of researchers investigating DMS effectiveness, to attribute the failure of DMS applications to poor SMTE performance and participation in DMS, as well as to organisational and managerial inefficiency.

A lack of capability and lack of interest can also be attributed to poor strategic management and marketing skills, and a lack of training (Daniele and Frew 2008). Training DMS users (DMO employees and tourism enterprises) on how to effectively use DMS, was found to be of importance to the effective usage of DMS (Bedard et al. 2008). Ritchie and Ritchie (2002) added that in many cases, training programmes for managers becomes important, in order to be able to learn how to use information effectively, especially for small operators who may lack formal training and prior exposure to research. Lacking interest is a result of insufficient knowledge about the potential of e-commerce, which is the major reason for SMTEs rejecting the use of IT (Frew and Davenport 2000; Sigala 2009). Consequently, these factors will be positively reflected in the DMS website effectiveness.

Creating a supportive, organisational technology environment, includes innovative approaches and technology expertise (Collins and Buhalis 2003; Wang 2008), influences the effectiveness of DMS, and enhances a destination's competitiveness in the e-marketplace. Other factors, such as securing system maintenance and improvements (UNCTAD 2005), an appropriate e-marketing strategy (e.g., website promotion on an international level and advertising campaigns on the Internet) (UNCTAD 2005; Wang 2008), and top management support and strong leadership (Chen and Sheldon 1997), are factors mentioned in the literature as being important influences on DMS website effectiveness.

The different perceptions of the DMS role and performance, were found to have an influence on the overall relationship between DMO and tourism providers, and to consequently influence the effectiveness of DMS (Hornby et al. 2008). Horan and Frew (2007) stressed that the success of DMS implementation is affected by the different views of various stakeholders on the role of DMS, and how performance is evaluated.

Frequent evaluations of DMS website effectiveness are needed, to ensure system validity, and to realise and solve problems that may face the system's development (Rita 2000; Ritchie and Ritchie 2002). In this respect, monitoring the evaluation process is needed. Sigala (2009) and Hornby et al. (2008) investigated the influence of power and trust on tourism providers' participation and adoption. They found that

power and trust have a crucial influence on DMS adoption. Hornby, et al. (2008) asserted that the power that might be exerted by some of the stakeholders, can influence the adoption of DMS, which is reflected in undermining the trust amongst DMOs and different stakeholders. As a consequence, the effectiveness of DMSs may be negatively affected. Still, the influence of trust and power on DMS effectiveness, is a matter that needs to be further investigated.

Much of the research investigating DMS websites, has ignored the evaluations that are currently been undertaken by destination management. Since no study has yet to investigate the evaluation perceptions of DMS management on the evaluation of DMS websites, research focusing on the measurement of DMS website evaluations, from a management perspective, is urgent. This thesis contributes to the previous literature, by providing destination management perceptions of DMS website evaluation metrics and approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS website effectiveness.

Therefore, based on the premise that scholarly knowledge has the potential for powerful effects if it is used in practice, a continually contested issue pertains to how such knowledge becomes used. The question then is whether such knowledge is used and also whether these evaluation approaches practice reflects best practices. According to the above literature, this study aims to investigate DMS website evaluation effectiveness, from both academic and industry perspectives; consequently, the conceptual framework for this thesis is as follows, in Figure 3.5

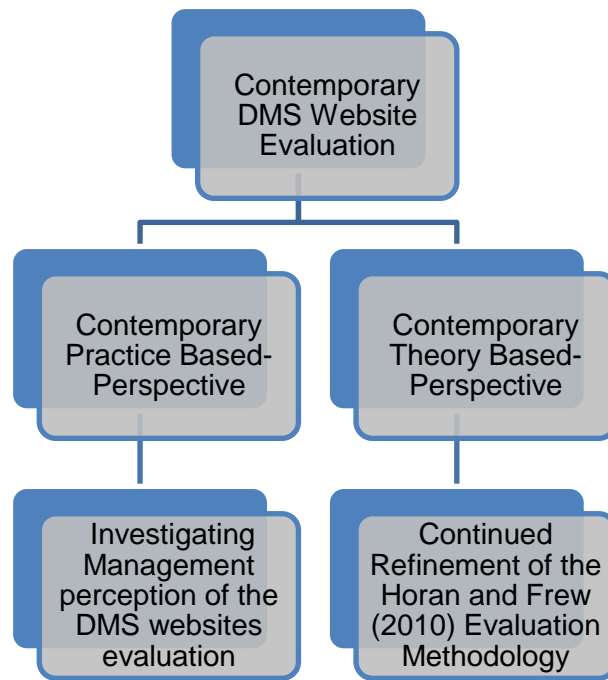


Figure 3.5 Conceptual Framework for Website Evaluation in Tourism

3.8 Conclusion

The field of DMS website evaluation has witnessed a number of attempts to assess its effectiveness, such as exploring the factors that influence its effectiveness, and developing comprehensive methodologies for an effective evaluation. However, this chapter argues that there is a need to for a continued refinement of the most recent and comprehensive evaluation methodology in the area of website effectiveness: Horan and Frew's (2010) method. This thesis also argues that DMS website studies have been excluded from management perceptions of the DMS effectiveness evaluation. Therefore, the goal is to reveal insights into practitioners' interpretations and uses of academic knowledge of DMS evaluation studies. To the best of researcher knowledge, this type of investigation has not been conducted in previous research, although it would provide valuable insights into the means of bridging the potential gap between theory and destination management practice. Therefore, this thesis presents a contemporary and up-to-date understanding of evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites, from both theoretical and destination management (industry) perspectives.

Chapter 4: **Methodology**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the research aims and objectives in addition to the data collections methods that have been adopted to carry out this research. It outlines the epistemological, theoretical and methodological values that underlie the methods chosen to answer the research questions identified in Chapter One. The research process is described and considered, and the relationship between the researcher and the research is also discussed. By doing this, the hope is to reduce assumptions that could be made within the processes of the research and make explicit the research decisions taken thus improving the rigour and validity of the work.

4.2 Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to investigate DMS websites effectiveness evaluation from both academic and industry (destination management) perspectives. As a final outcome, this study concludes validating a comprehensive model for DMS websites evaluation, and will also enhance the understanding of DMS websites effectiveness evaluation as performed by the destination management. Therefore,

The Aim of the study is:

To investigate contemporary thinking on DMS website' evaluation from both academic and destination management's perspectives.

Based on the study aim, in investigating the academic contemporary thinking on DMS websites, an examination of the current evaluation approaches and the most recent comprehensive evaluation methodology for DMS websites in tourism, the Horan and Frew (2010) was reviewed. With regards to the study aim, in investigating the destination management contemporary thinking on DMS websites, this research explored the current evaluation dimensions, criteria and approaches, and actual evaluation of the destination management. The research developed a descriptive

conceptual framework that presents the current evaluation of DMS websites in both academic and industry perspectives. The aim of the study is also supported by the following objective.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To generate an up-to-date and comprehensive set of dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website.
2. To generate an up-to-date and comprehensive set of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website.
3. To identify the current dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website, as used by destination management.
4. To identify the current criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a website, as used by destination management.
5. To identify the current evaluation approaches for evaluation the effectiveness of a DMS website, as used by destination management.
6. To compare the gap between the academic recommendations and actual destination management practices.

4.3 Problem Definition

Previous research has addressed some elements that are common to this study (Horan and Frew 2007, Law et al. 2010, Ip et al. 2010; Chiou et al. 2010; Young Hoon and Mincheol 2010; Li and Wang 2011; Fernández-Cavia et al. 2013; Fernández-Cavia et al. 2014; Gupta and Utkarsh 2014; Estêvão et al. 2014; Sigala 2014; Del Vasto-Terrientes et al. 2015). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge no studies have addressed the specific aspects identified in the research questions and research problem stated on Page 49. This current thesis does not start from a blank sheet but draws on and acknowledges previous accumulated knowledge of the subject of DMS websites evaluation.

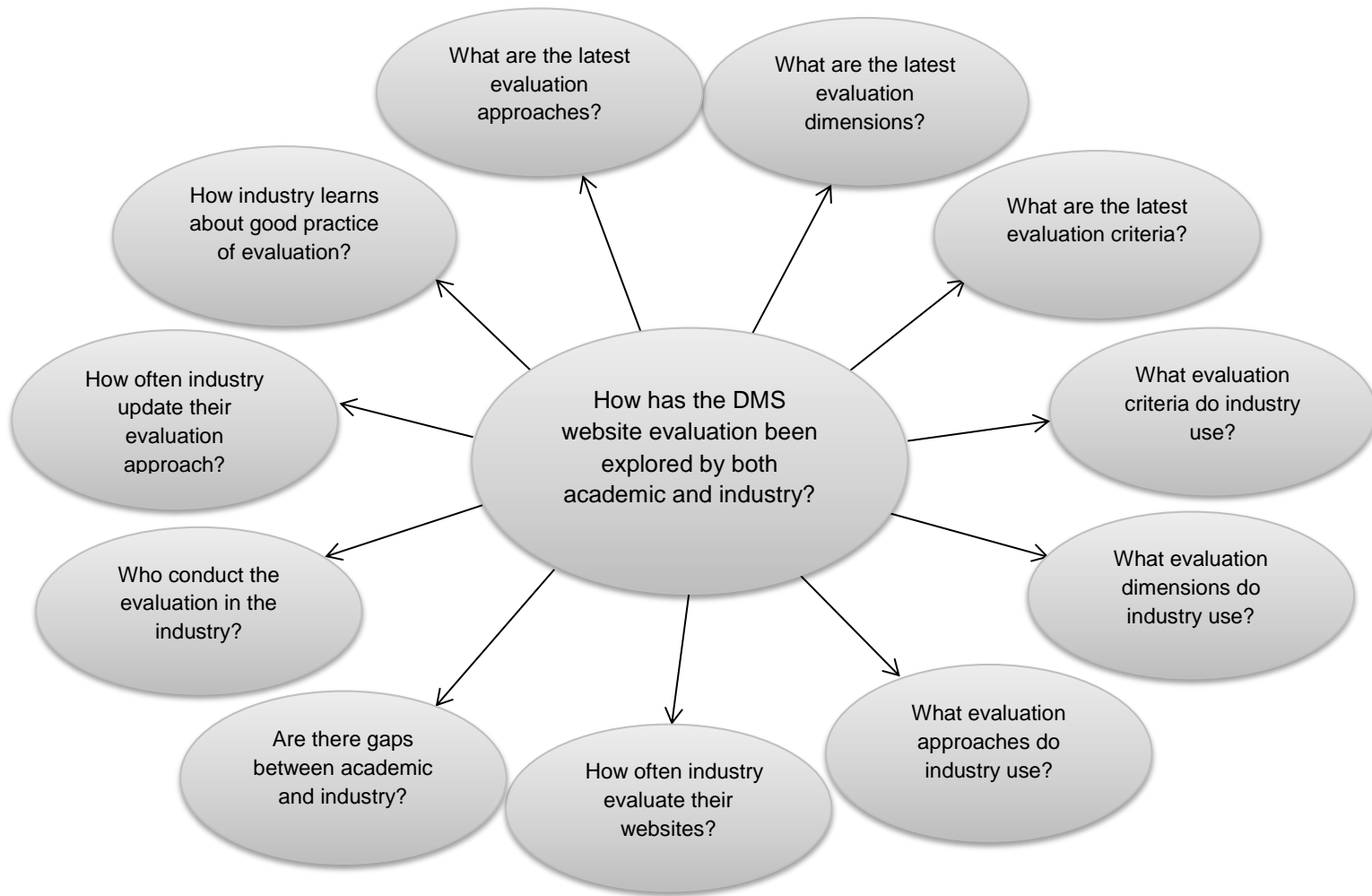


Figure 4.1 Problem Definition

4.4 Research Schematic

Figure 4.2 is the schematic diagram of the research process undertaken in this thesis. It shows the research components, parts, and tasks and their interconnections and their flow in the process followed within it.

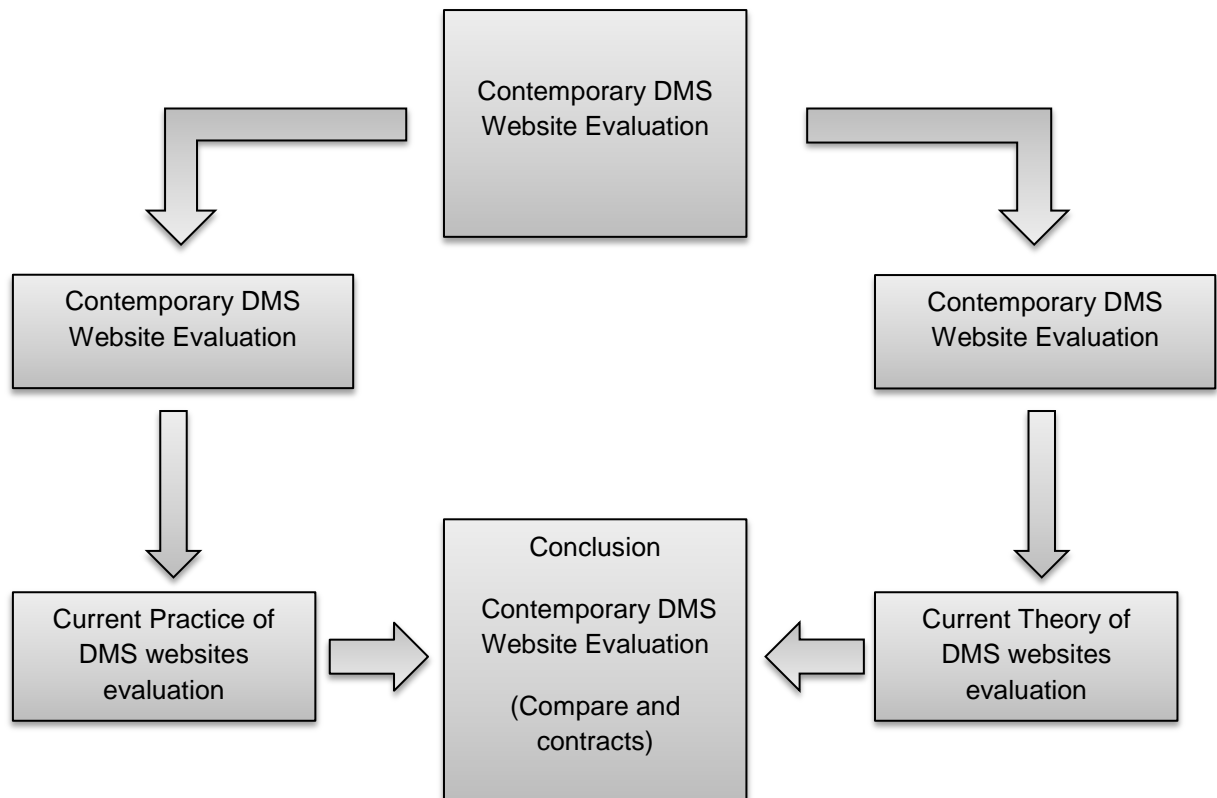


Figure 4.2 Research Schematic

4.5 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is the study of being, that is, the nature of existence and what constitutes reality (Denscombe 2007). It answers the question of how study views the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). According to some academics, the world is independent of our knowledge, it exists “out there” while for relativists and others, there are multiple realities and ways of accessing them (Gray 2014).

Western thinkers are divided into two opposing ontological traditions, the ‘Heraclitus’ and ‘Parmenides’. The Heraclitus tradition emphasises a changing world, while the Parmenides tradition advocates a permanent and unchanging reality. Between the Heraclitean ontology of ‘becoming’ and the Parmenidean ontology of ‘being’, it is the latter that has held sway in western philosophy (Gray 2014). This reality is seen as being composed of clearly formed entities in contrast to the Heraclitean concept that emphasises chaos and absence (Gray 2014). Chia (2002) challenges the traditional being ontology with notions of a becoming orientated, as well as the limitations of truth-seeking.

This study adopts a Heraclitean ontology stance. The eDistribution arena is a very dynamic environment with business goals changing constantly (Burby 2004). The evaluation criteria and dimensions within the Horan and Frew (2010) model need to be modified and restructured over time to reflect these changes. Furthermore, there has been no theoretical research investigated the DMS websites evaluation, based on both academic experts and tourism managers. There has been no study identified if there are gaps between the academic recommendations and actual destination management practices in term of the evaluation. This research emphasises the idea of a changing world, thus moving toward a standardised approach for DMS website evaluation as well investigating how far the industry come along with their development of DMS website evaluation approaches. Therefore, a deeper understanding of this topic is required from both perspectives, which will contribute to the body of knowledge in this field of interest.

While ontology embodies an understanding of ‘what is’, epistemology tries to understand what it means to know, or ‘how we come to know what we know’ (Gray 2014). Epistemology provides a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate (Creswell 2009). Having an epistemological perspective helps the researcher not only in the research design,

but also helps in the overarching structure of the entire research. Epistemology could be objectivism, constructivism, or subjectivism (Gray 2014).

Objectivist epistemology holds that there is an objective reality “out there” and the research is about discovering this objective truth. Constructivism on the other hand, maintains that truth and meaning do not exist in the external world, but they are created by subject’s interactions with the world and therefore, the meaning of constructivist epistemology is constructed not discovered. Subjectivism epistemology is nearly the same as constructivism epistemology and thus subjects do construct meaning, but do from within collective unconsciousness (Gray 2014).

While different epistemological positions are based on ‘being’ ontology (Bunge 1993), this study assumes that reality is socially constructed “by humans through their action and interaction” (Gray 2014). Thus to investigate contemporary thinking on DMS websites evaluation from academic and destination management perspectives without acknowledging the evaluation in the context in which it is been experienced and researched is to ignore a fundamental facet of the DMS websites evaluation. In this research it is important to gain understanding of DMS websites evaluation as conducted by academia. Similarly the differing evaluation of the DMS websites as in the context of the industry (destination management) needs to be acknowledged. Thus the academic and industry perspectives of evaluation must both be explored. This study assumes that information systems and DMS websites do not exist apart from humans, and cannot be understood in an objective way. Therefore, this study regards social reality to be subjective in nature and that it can only be interpreted. Hence, a constructivist epistemology perspective was adopted in this study.

The perspective of social constructionism allows researcher to explore the way of thinking of in a social order. Each individual in the social constructionism encounters these as social facts to which they might have to adjust (Gray 2014). In this case DMS websites evaluation is socially produced and explained by academics experts and destination managers as natural way of thinking. DMS websites evaluation is explored in their natural setting from the perspectives of people who experience it (Greene 2000).

Social constructionists recognise and accept that the researcher affects the choice of research area, design, writing, analysis and outcomes, and they acknowledge there may be some areas of research that are more likely to form the focus of social

constructionist research (Gray 2014). From one set of research, many different accounts of the same phenomena may be constructed that represent different researchers' views, experiences and multiple realities. The influence of the researcher cannot be ignored (Gray 2014) and therefore there is an expectation that the researcher will impact upon the results of the study through their participation in data collection and analysis.

The context of DMS websites evaluation and the complexity of it require a social constructionist outlook as a framework for the research. The researcher knowledge about the previous literature review surrounding DMS evaluation as well as the most recent evaluation methodology, the Horan and Frew (2010) which the current thesis continues to refine it may influence the interpretation of data in the first part of the thesis.

4.6 Theoretical Perspective

Different theoretical perspectives are available to the researcher and it is consistent with the researcher's epistemology and demonstrates the kind of research methodology that emerges from it. Examples of these theoretical perspectives that have been used in the social research are positivism, interpretivism, critical inquiry, postmodernism, pragmatism and feminism (Chia McNamara 2009). This study will highlight the main theoretical perspectives used in social sciences and particularly information system research, the positivism and interpretivism perspectives.

Positivism argues that social world exists externally to the researcher and that its properties can be measured through observation. In other words, positivist research seeks to explain social phenomena based on the approach used in natural sciences. Hence ideas can be incorporated to knowledge if they can be put to the test of empirical experiences (Collis and Hussey 2003). This study is not adopting or following this methodology as the aim of this research is not observation but rather seeks to find and explore "direct evidence" rather than "indirect evidence" of DMS website evaluation in both sectors academic and industry (Gray 2014). Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) regard information system research as positivist if it provides generalising from a particular sample to a large population, which is not the case of the current research. The aim of this study is to have rich and in-depth insight to understand, explore and investigate DMS websites evaluation from both academic

and destination management perspectives. To investigate the area of DMS websites evaluation, observation is inadequate.

Interpretivism on the other hand, argues that the world is interpreted through the classification schemes of the mind (William and May 1996). In other words, there is no direct relationship between 'us' and 'the world'. Interpretivist research seeks to understand and interpret human behaviour "from the participant's own frame of reference" (Hussey and Hussey 1997, pp. 52). Interpretivists believe that "each situation is seen as unique and its meaning is a function of the circumstances and the individuals involved" (Remenyi et al. 1998, pp. 33). Interpretive researchers explicitly recognise that understanding social reality requires understanding how practices and meanings are formed and informed by humans (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Participants in interpretivist research use their own words and the researcher's task is to draw on their concepts and experiences in order to describe, interpret and understand the social world from participants' perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln 2003).

This study adopts this theoretical perspective, i.e. the interpretivism perspective due to the researcher's belief that the laws of science and social reality are different and should not use only one method to study them both. In other words, some science consists almost of mathematical formulation, and these are not produced by observation. Furthermore, the outcome of this study represents the researcher's own interpretation of the interpretations of both academic recommendations and destination management practice on DMS websites evaluations and its effectiveness. The literature review has revealed that DMS websites evaluations and its effectiveness is a complex phenomenon (see section 3.2). Such complexity results from either the subjectivity of the meaning of effectiveness or from the complexity of the context in which DMS website are developed. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991, pp. 18) argue that the interpretive perspective "is explicitly designed to capture complex, dynamic, social phenomena that are both context and time dependent".

The research aims to understand the reality of DMS website evaluation and therefore the reality of this can be known only from individuals (academic and destination management) who experience this reality. The research deals with the actions of destination management regarding how they evaluate their websites. This research is not looking for consistency in the data in order to deduce model or

framework for DMS websites evaluation, but rather to enhance understanding, present a picture of the current DMS websites evaluations from theory and actual practice perspectives.

The theoretical framework for this research was influenced, not only by the social constructionist approach but also by the research questions. These had been identified by a perceived gap in the current literature. In aiming to study the contemporary thinking of DMS websites evaluation, the research questions had to reflect the two perspectives of the academic and industry in contexts that the evaluation occurred in, along with other aspects that may have impacted on the evaluation within the industry.

The contemporary nature of the research area suggests the need to adopt a phenomenological inquiry to enhance understanding of DMS website evaluation. Phenomenology holds that any attempts to understand social reality have to be grounded in peoples experiences of that social reality (Gray 2014). Hence, value is ascribed not only to the interpretations of researches, but also to the subjects of the research themselves (Gray 2014). The nature of this research seeks to find and explore the internal logic and experience of DMS websites evaluation. Phenomenology allowed the examination of the current DMS website evaluation as performed and conducted by both perspectives.

There is no doubt that, had one wished to develop DMS website evaluation model based on the two perspectives; without reference to the actual experience of evaluation as it occurs in the industry. A grounded theory, would offer an appropriate method for the research topic. Grounded theory approach allows researchers to build theories directly from the immediate data they collect from their fieldwork rather than depending on existing theories (Strauss and Corbin 1997). In this sense, researchers use the empirical research to establish directly the variables, concepts and relationships which will be combined in the theory (Remenyi et al. 1998).

Grounded theory strategy is not employed here, as this study aims to generate and identify the current evaluation dimensions, criteria and approaches of DMS websites evaluation in both sectors, and to compare and contrast data of the fieldwork in relation to the findings of reviewing the literature so as to improve the understanding of DMS website evaluation from both perspective (academic and industry). Furthermore, true grounded theory approach does not start with focused research questions; rather the question emerges from the data. Thus its use in this case

would be inappropriate as several questions already exist based on the researcher's reading of the literature. However, as the idea was to find out how the destination management evaluated their DMS website evaluation. This does not preclude, however, the use of the grounded theory data analysis process of constant comparison to assist in understanding the current evaluation of DMS as performed by industry. Parahoo (1997) and Crookes and Davies (1999) suggest that grounded theory is not discipline bound and is really a set of processes and a form of analysis that guide researchers, rather than a distinct research method.

One could argue investigating how destination management evaluate their DMS imply some of the elements of action research. However, action research aims at changing a particular situation and monitoring the results of such change (Collis and Hussey 2003). It assumes that "the social world is changing and the researcher and the research itself are parts of this change" (Collis and Hussey 2003, p. 66). Action research produces two outcomes: research to learn about a particular situation, and action to be taken to change the conditions of this situation in the studied organization (Robson and Cordoba 2005). The aim of this study is to explore and understand the phenomenon under investigation and not to make changes or monitor the influence. As the researcher of this study is not in a position to gain such deep interaction or make changes in the studied system context rather than present the current and up-to-date DMS website evaluation from both academic and industry perspectives. A list of recommendations based of the findings is given in the Chapter 8.

Therefore, this research can be classified as a phenomenological research as it allows the understanding of how the DMS website evaluation been explored by both perspires (academia and industry). The research questions focus on both perspectives and they require attention in relation to relationships and substantive contextual data which are more likely to be achieved through the use of mixed methods which fit with the epistemological, theoretical and methodological frameworks discussed previously.

4.7 Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research

The research methodology refers to "the procedures framework within which the research is conducted" (Remenyi et al. 1998, p. 30). It determines what research methods are appropriate for gathering valid evidence (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991).

Methodology is defined as “a bridge between our philosophical standpoint (ontology and epistemology) and methods; it is related to how we carry out our research” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2010, p. 38) in the light of the predefined ontological and epistemological assumptions (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002). In what follows, the adopted research strategy and how it is designed to gather and interpret the evidence of this study are discussed.

Research methods can be classified in various ways; however one of the most common distinctions is the between qualitative and quantitative research methods (Creswell 2003). Quantitative research emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data, while theories are tested for their validation. In contrast, qualitative research strategy produces findings by making interpretations of peoples words and views (Romeu 2007; Bryman and Bell 2007). Mixed methods research is becoming increasingly recognised as a major research approach (Gray 2014). A study of the definitions provided by nineteen (19) mixed methods research methods, found that three definitions considered that the mixing occurred at the data collection stage, two definitions suggested that mixing occurred at both the data collection and data analysis stages, while four assumed that mixing can occur at all stages of the research process (Gray 2014). Mixed methods have been defined by Creswell et al. (2003) as:

The collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of data at one or more stages in the process of research (Creswell et al. 2003, p. 212)

Mixed methods allow for a more thorough understanding of the research problem under investigation (Bryman 2004; Bryman and Bell 2007). Mixed methods could combine two qualitative methods without the use of quantitative methods (Yin 2006). A benefit of a mixed methods approach is that it allows triangulation. This means that several qualitative methods and the answers from both data sets are combined and compared (Gray 2014). The nature of data collected in this study was based upon a mixed methods research to gain a richer, contextual understanding of the topic of DMS websites evaluation based on academic recommendations, and destination management perspectives. This research used a combination of different methods to establish, collect and analyse the data. These included literature searches, Delphi study, structured interviews, online survey and critical

reflection. These methods combined adaptability and flexibility whilst enabling cross-checking between different methods and participants for reliability of information.

4.8 Selection of Research Methods

The complexity of DMS website evaluation and the need to investigate and explore it from both academic and industry perspectives do not effectively allow for objective measurement. This is because we need to identify and explore the actual individual's actions and experiences regarding how DMS website evaluation is conducted in reality from both perspectives. Therefore, a mixed method approach is used in undertaking this research. The research instruments used were Delphi technique for investigating the contemporary thinking on DMS websites evaluation from academic perspective, and structured interviews and online survey for investigating the contemporary thinking on DMS website evaluation from destination management practice (industry). These instruments were conducted online and face-to-face.

Before these instruments were selected, alternative research methods were considered. For the academic perspective, it might have been useful to send online questioners to identified experts in the area of DMS website evaluation. However, as the first aim of the thesis was to generate an up-to date evaluation dimensions and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites evaluation. This issue is complex and it is toward developing an effectiveness evaluation framework for DMS websites. There are a lot of debates about what should we adopt when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS. Previous research uses a wide variety of evaluation dimensions and criteria making it difficult to identify them and it is still in a debate. Therefore, the important was to reach censuses regarding DMS website evaluation criteria and dimensions. Although online survey is good would allow gathering such evaluation dimensions and criteria. However, Delphi technique allows to facilitate arrival at a consensus of professional opinion on DMS website evaluation criteria and dimensions and it is absolutely crucial to adapt it in order to investigate how far academic been regard with the latest dimensions and criteria that are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites.

For investigating the destination management perspective regarding their evaluation the use of structured interviews allowed data to be collected in order to develop the industry online survey at later stage. Instead of using the Internet, the online survey

could have been delivered via post or over the telephone. Some of the respondents may have found it tedious to take the time to return the questionnaire by post or spend time answering questions over the phone as compared to completing the questionnaire online and clicking on a submit button. Furthermore, online surveys do have higher response rates and a slightly higher rate of completeness and quality than surveys conducted through traditional methods (Glover and Bush 2005).

4.9 Research Design

Research design involves the intersection of philosophy, research strategies of inquiry and specific methods (Bryman and Bell 2007). It is “the logic that links the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to the initial questions of a study; it ensures coherence” (Rowley 2002, pp. 18). Research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman and Bell 2007). Researchers can choose from different research designs based on their research methodology that suit the purposes of their research. Researchers can choose from different research designs, including. experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography or archival research (Yin 2008). The bellow figure (Figure 4.1) shows the design of this research:

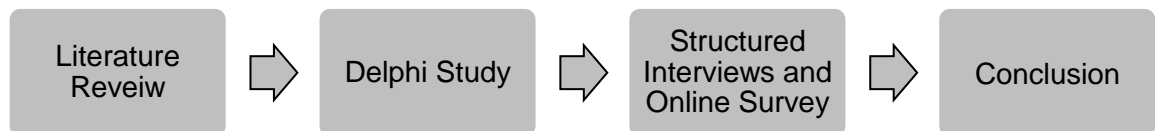


Figure 4.3 Research Design

As shown above a combination of Delphi study and structured online survey methods were adopted in this study to cover the academic and destination management perspectives of DMS websites evaluation. Each group needed a particular way to collect their data. The next section will address the process of collecting these data in further details.

4.9.1 Delphi Study

4.9.1.1 4.4.1.1 Definition and concepts

Delphi study is an anonymous group decision mechanism requiring qualified experts with a deep knowledge and understanding of an existing issue (Celiktas and Kocar 2010; Okoli and Pawlowski 2004). The aim of this mechanism is to facilitate arrival at a consensus of professional opinion on a particular topic (Celiktas and Kocar 2010; Hicks 2009). The procedures of the Delphi study use the collection of data that has been gathered from identified experts in response to open-ended initial questions regarding a particular subject. The data is then compiled and analysed for feedback through a second round in a questionnaire for additional ratings. This process is then repeated in subsequent rounds (usually, the third round is the final round) until consensus agreements on the data have been reached (Brill et al. 2006).

The Delphi process differs from other traditional surveys and focus group methods in that the idea generation in Delphi is individual-based, anonymous, and independent. The members are geographically dispersed, and not swayed by group pressure, and this makes the interpersonal conflicts and communication problems virtually non-existent (Loo 2002). Furthermore, travel to a central location is not required in a Delphi study, and this makes the travel costs and the problem of coordination, that of gathering all participants in the same place at the same time, non-existent. In addition to that, and most importantly, the use of successive rounds in a Delphi method enables the researcher to build upon earlier results and to maintain focus in the study (Loo 2002).

The Delphi method has been used in different perspectives of studies, such as program planning, needs assessments, policy determinations and correlation judgments in different fields of education, public administration and other economic and business issues (Kreber 2002; Saizarbitoria 2006; Rosenbaum 2010; Rikkonen 2006; Landeta 2006; Greatorex and Dexter 2000). The first Delphi study conducted was in the 1950s in the US, by the RAND Corporation and two research scientists, Olaf Helmer and Norman Dalkey (Custer et al. 1999). It was used as a tool procedure to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts for forecasting the effects that new military technology might have on the future of

warfare. The study was conducted using a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback.

The number of Delphi rounds required depends on the information gathered at different stages in the Delphi process, and also on the nature of the research question being examined (Kreber 2002). Typically, three rounds of questionnaires are sent to an identified expert panel to reach a final consensus (Powell 2003). The number of rounds rarely exceeds three as this encourages boredom which can lead to a high attrition rate (Rowe and Wright 1999). Furthermore, although the decision over the number of rounds is variable and largely pragmatic, it seldom goes beyond one or two iteration rounds, during which time the most changes in panellists' responses generally occurs (Rowe and Wright 1999). However, it has been claimed that the number of rounds is sufficient when stability—and not consensus—in the responses is attained (Makkonen et al. 2012).

The first round of the Delphi procedure is unstructured (more open-ended) allowing the experts to identify and establish the central focus on those issues they see as important (Rowe and Wright 1999). It is beneficial in the Delphi method to focus on the topic being investigated without constraining the participants to a particular format. Therefore, it can be difficult to accurately predict the content and nature of each round before conducting the first round of the study. Thus, the findings from the initial round of a Delphi study will influence the subsequent results from the research, and will also shape the questions and structure of the subsequent rounds (Lang 2003). These following rounds are designed to enable a consensus to be reached. In these rounds of questionnaires, participants typically receive a summary on the question included in the previous survey round, along with a new questionnaire, and they have the opportunity to rank or rate the responses of the entire panel. The final result is a set of responses that have been agreed to, at least to some degree (Ritchie et al. 2005).

However, Delphi may be characterised as a 'method for structuring a group communication process, so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with complex problems' (Linstone and Turoff 2002). This 'structured communication' can be accomplished through: some feedback of panels contributions of information and knowledge; in addition to the assessment of their judgement regarding the target issue; the opportunity for revising their views; and the anonymity for the individual responses. Thereby, the Delphi method can be

considered a qualitative method, as it collects the ideas and feedback in a qualitative manner. On the other hand, Delphi can also be considered a quantitative method in that the nature of analysing and evaluating the data occurs in a quantitative manner.

The Delphi method has also been considered a practical method that can be used and applied widely to practical problems in a way those benefits, to a great extent, from the use of information-technology-assisted methods (Makkonen et al. 2012). Formerly, it was common to gather expert opinions in meetings or through in-depth interviews. Nowadays, the development of information technology and the spread of the Internet allow the sampling of opinions from fairly large numbers of experts, avoiding potential dominance by particularly persuasive individuals.

The forecasting of tourism developments using this method can be made relatively quickly and inexpensively (Kaynak 1994). The Delphi method encourages greater freedom of expression, and the individual panel members may feel that more so through the written and anonymous responses rather than a conventional panel discussion (Gibson, 1990). Moreover, it encourages learning from additional dimensions that may be overlooked in earlier responses. The Delphi method provides a useful way of identifying a broad range of ideas and new perspectives to problem solving. Individual panellists sometimes revise their initial opinions in light of other experts' responses, and this makes the Delphi method an effective technique for developing consensus (Gibson 1999). And even where no agreement develops, the Delphi method still helps to clarify the issue, crystallise the reasoning process, and increase the accuracy of a participant's understanding of the position of others (Singh 2005).

Iteration and its controlled feedback are the most important features of Delphi study (Bardecki 1984). The Delphi process is used to collect and distil the judgments of experts using a series of questionnaires designed to focus on problems, solutions or forecasts. Each subsequent questionnaire is developed based on the results of the previous questionnaire. The Delphi process stops iterating when consensus regarding the questions being asked is reached, or when sufficient information has been collected. The benefit from this iterative controlled feedback process is that experts are consulted at least twice on the same question, and they are given feedback (between the questionnaire rounds) informing them of their anonymous colleagues' opinions (Makkonen 2012). However, most changes in Delphi

responses occur in the first and second rounds (Nelms and Porter 1985). Often, feedback is presented as a sample statistical summary of the group response, usually a mean or median value (Armstrong 2001).

A number of different types of Delphi study have been identified. These are: the 'Classical Delphi', the 'Policy Delphi' and the 'Decision Delphi' (Hasson et al. 2000). The Classical Delphi is characterised by five essential features, which are anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, statistical group response, and stability in responses among those on a specific issue. Participants here are giving their opinions to arrive at stability in responses. The Policy Delphi is not used to reach stability in responses among the participants, but rather to describe a variety of alternatives to a policy issue using a structured public dialogue. Here the Delphi is an instrument used for policy development by discovering the strongest pro and con arguments about differing resolutions by obtaining as many divergent opinions as possible (Rayens and Hahn 2000). The Decision Delphi is used for decision-making on social developments, i.e. the decision-makers involved in the problem participate in the Delphi and are selected according to their position in the hierarchy of decision-makers (Rauch 1979). In this thesis, we are using the Delphi technique to reach a consensus in respect of the most recent criteria and dimensions that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites evaluation. The proposed study will therefore adopt the approach of the Classical Delphi.

In order for a Delphi study to be carried out effectively, four key detailed planning and execution activities should be considered before conducting and designing the study. These effective planning and execution activities can be summarised into four essential steps: the problem definition, the panel selection, determining the panel size, and conducting the Delphi rounds questionnaires (Loo 2000).

Problem definition is an important initial step to ensure the scope of the questions being investigated, in order to reach the outcomes of the study. The problem of the study should also be clear and should not include any ambiguity in its questions. An unambiguously defined problem helps in discriminating relevant data from irrelevant data. In other words, a well-defined problem helps in selecting appropriate panel experts and ultimately in collecting the required data (Loo 2002).

Since a group approach to forecasting and decision-making relies on expert opinion, it is obviously important that the Delphi study requires a panel of qualified experts. According to Day (2005), establishing the expertise of the panel participants affects

the quality of the outcomes. In fact, the key to a successful Delphi study lies in the selection of participants (Gordon 1994). Moreover, the information obtained by the Delphi study is only as good as the experts who participate on the panel (Yousuf 2007). Therefore, it is important that the selection criteria for nominating experts should be clearly articulated, e.g. number of years of experience, number of publications. However, participants are considered eligible to be invited to participate in a Delphi study if they have relevant quality knowledge and experience of the target issue, and are willing to give their feedback and revise their initial or previous judgments also (Loo 2002). As a result, another issue appears which is to what extent we consider an individual an expert. Gutierrez (1989) defines experts as a group of knowledgeable people: those who can provide relevant input to the process, have the highest authority possible, and are committed and interested. Moreover, these experts are those who can provide more than merely a sensible guess to the result, as they bring to bear in-depth understanding or relationships leading to a result (Still et al. 1999). Therefore, it is important to select the right experts to ensure that that Delphi study is effective and successful. However, it is also important to inform the prospective panels before conducting the Delphi study that their commitment to participate will involve several rounds of questions over a period of months (Loo 2002).

To complete the proposed study successfully, and in keeping with the above literature, panel members from academic sector who have knowledge and experience in the areas of DMS websites evaluation, website evaluation and DMS websites effectiveness will be included in the study. Furthermore, to make this study more effective, and to select the most qualified experts, the chosen panel was required to have written or presented on at least two or more related topics, journal articles, or conferences in the previous mentioned areas.

4.4.1.2 Sample size in the Delphi Study

There is no agreement on the ideal panel size for a Delphi study, nor recommendations or unequivocal definitions of 'small' or 'large' samples. There is also a lack of agreement around the expert sample size and no criteria against which a sample size choice could be judged (Akins et al. 2005). For example, Day and Bobeva (2005) state that the typical size of the panel members varies between 7 and 35 participants. While Reid (1988) states that the panel size can be as large as 1,685. However, many published Delphi studies use panels consisting between

10 and 100 panellists, or more (Akins et al. 2005). Saizarbitoria (2006) states that the participants may not have the appropriate level of expertise if the panel size is too big. Czinkota and Ronkainen (1997) report that a panel larger than 30 participants rarely uncovers any additional ideas. The number of respondents can be much smaller than that which is traditionally thought to be sufficient to guarantee the reliability of a survey. In addition to that, the respondents are not picked randomly but are selected because of their knowledge and experience in the field of study being investigated (Loo 2002). Therefore, it was decided in this part of the research to target the typical size of panel (between 7 and 35) participants, to achieve the aims of this study.

The study group coordinator is the person who controls the exchanges of information between the individuals (Pickard 2007). Therefore, the role of the group coordinator (the researcher) is crucial in achieving an effective Delphi process which is as smooth as possible, to reach a final consensus regarding the existing issue, and ultimately to achieve the main aim of the Delphi study. The coordinator should also address the issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Loo 2002). Furthermore, additional information may also be provided by the coordinator, such as the arguments from participants whose judgements from others fall outside certain limits. In this situation, the task for the researcher is to compile feedback and gather the opinions of all group members, and after several rounds of questionnaire iteration, the final judgment is taken as the statistical average (mean/median) of the participants' estimates in the final round. However, the final judgment may be seen as an equal weighting of the qualified expert panel (Rowe 1999).

The time taken for research using the Delphi method remains a problem, even with the development of such means of communication as fax, email and websites. For example, sending the first round questionnaire, receiving its feedback and analysing it, before sending the following resolution, requires at least a full month or more (Okoli and Pawlowski 2004). Although the Delphi method does not require a large sample of individuals, selecting a group of experts and ensuring their participation requires a lot of care, which leads to the consumption of a considerable amount of time. The researcher might also face bias problems that could result from the lack of response from some participants. However, withdrawal is rare in Delphi studies and a researcher can easily recognise the reason for the withdrawal and can speak directly with withdrawing participants (Keeney et al. 2011).

The need of a knowledgeable, experienced and qualified panel of academic experts is required to identify the recent dimensions and criteria that the academic experts thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a destination based websites. Now the Delphi method is being used to estimate past development, i.e. experts' opinions of the causes and effects of different issues in the past few decades. Furthermore, using the Delphi method among tourism academics can yield a set of reliable service quality, cost and convenience scales (Rosenbaum and Wong 2010).

It can be expected that the use of Delphi will continue to grow, as a body of knowledge is developing on how to structure the human communication process for particular classes of problems (Linstone et al. 2002). Figure 4.3 illustrates the Delphi study process that has been adopted during this stage of the study.

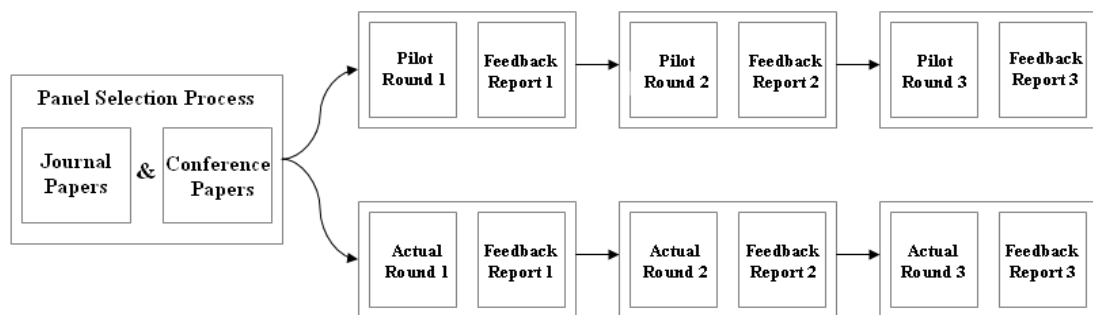


Figure 4.4 The Delphi Process

4.4.1.3 Practical plan for Delphi

The purpose of this Delphi study is to identify the recent dimensions and criteria that the academic experts thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS websites. The purpose of the Delphi study in this research is to update and refine the components of the most 'recent' comprehensive study in the field of Destination Management Systems (DMS) website; and better validate the Horan and Frew (2010) evaluation model framework. By doing this, the research identified the contemporary dimensions and criteria that the academic experts thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS websites. In order to accomplish this aim, a Delphi study was conducted to come up with inputs and maybe different new items that will be added to the original framework to update it. It is crucial for a variety of the following reasons:

1. The Delphi itself will look like a series of the most necessary updates and inputs for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. These inputs will not make sense if it has been conducted at a previous time, or has been applied on different channels of distribution.
2. The current Delphi study will also update and refine the components that should be considered to be most relevant for inclusion in a definition and aims of a Destination Managements System (DMS).
3. The results of the Delphi study will update the panellists with any new criteria and items that should be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. This will ultimately affect the validity of the whole new updated dimensions and criteria in order to measure the effectiveness of any selected destination website.

Three rounds of questionnaires have been employed to seek the consensus of experts regarding the most recent updated areas, criteria, and dimensions that should be adopted when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. Each round was completed online by panel members. The first and second rounds were designed using Bristol Survey Online (BOS), while the third and final round was designed using the SurveyMonkey software. SurveyMonkey software has been used because of the greater diversity and complexity in the designed questions after the collection of so many items and responses from the first and second rounds. SurveyMonkey has also used median scores, which were calculated in the third round and needed to be inserted in the survey. The median scores have been calculated as measures of central tendency, and to determine the degree of importance and consensus for each item for another feedback for panel participants. The responses in each round were analysed and compiled to build the next round's questionnaire.

4.4.1.4 Determining search strategies

a) Keywords

Keywords that have been used to search for the required articles and authors' names for Delphi participation in the journals and conferences in the area of DMS websites evaluation are illustrated as follows:

Website assessment, website features, tourism website, tourism website evaluation, website evaluation, website measurement, website quality, destination website, destination website evaluation, destination management system website, DMS website evaluation.

These keywords are nearly the same as those that were used when searching for the literature review for the main research.

b) Databases

The databases that have been used in all stages in this Delphi study included the main Sciencedirect.com and EBESCO, in addition to the eJournals and ENTER conferences proceedings, Google, Google Scholar, and other information technology websites such as IFITT (the International Federation for Information Technologies in Travel and Tourism) have also been used to search for the data. However, as the previous study- the Horan and Frew (2010) -has selected topics to search for the qualified panellists for their research over the period (between 1st January 2001 and 31st December 2004), and because the aim of this study to further develop the framework in that previous study, as well as to collect the most recently updated criteria and items required for evaluating the effectiveness of destination websites, it has been decided in this research to look for topics after the year 2005, i.e. between 1st January 2005 and 31st December 2011. All the articles were put into a list with their publication date, author name, email addresses of the author/authors, name of the journal article or conference, volume and number of the article, in addition to the name of the organisation that the author or the expert practitioner belongs to.

To make the collection of data comprehensive, and to ensure the reliability and the validity of this Delphi study, it was decided that the search would begin, one by one, with topics related to information technology and hospitality and tourism. For example, Information Technology and Tourism Journal from the year 2005 to the year 2011 for all required articles would be searched first, and then another journal such as ENTER Conferences Proceedings articles from 2005 to 2011, and so on.

Although the decision was made to start searches from the year 2005 for the topics related to the areas of DMS websites evaluation, it was found that some articles produced before 2005 needed to be integrated into the list because of their importance to this study. In other words, the current research has not ignored all of the articles found in the previous studies, but has included them to achieve the main

aim from conducting this study. Table 4.1 presents the journals and proceedings that have been used to collect the data (selection of panel) and also for the literature review.

Table 4.1 Journals and Proceeding Used for the Literature Review

Information Technology and Tourism journals 2005-2012	ENTER Proceedings from 2005-2012
Annals of Tourism Research	Hospitality and Tourism complete
International Journal Contemporary Hospitality Management	Tourism Analysis
Journal of Travel Research	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
Journal of Vacation Marketing	Tourism Management
Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing	International Journal of Tourism Research
International Journal of Culture Tourism and Hospitality Research	International Journal of Tourism.

From the results of the searching process at this stage, it has been found that 75 articles relate to the current research topic in the Information and Technology and Tourism Journal and these selected articles have all been published between 2005 and 2011. Another 16 articles from other journals relate to the existing topics and some of these articles were published in 2005.

From those selected articles, authors were found who had delivered at least two journal articles in the areas of DMS websites, destination websites, website evaluation, and destination website effectiveness. Again, the main aim of conducting this Delphi study was not only to gather as much information as possible from the experts, but also to insure the reliability and validity of this study due to its importance, as it will become the latest updated conducted Delphi study in this field. After collecting these names, the next stage was to select the 'best panel participants for this study' and the following procedure was followed in order to select the 'best qualified experts'.

c) Selecting the “Qualified “Articles and Panels

After selecting the relevant journals, the following figure (Figure 4.3) shows the full process and the criteria that was followed in order to select the panel experts;

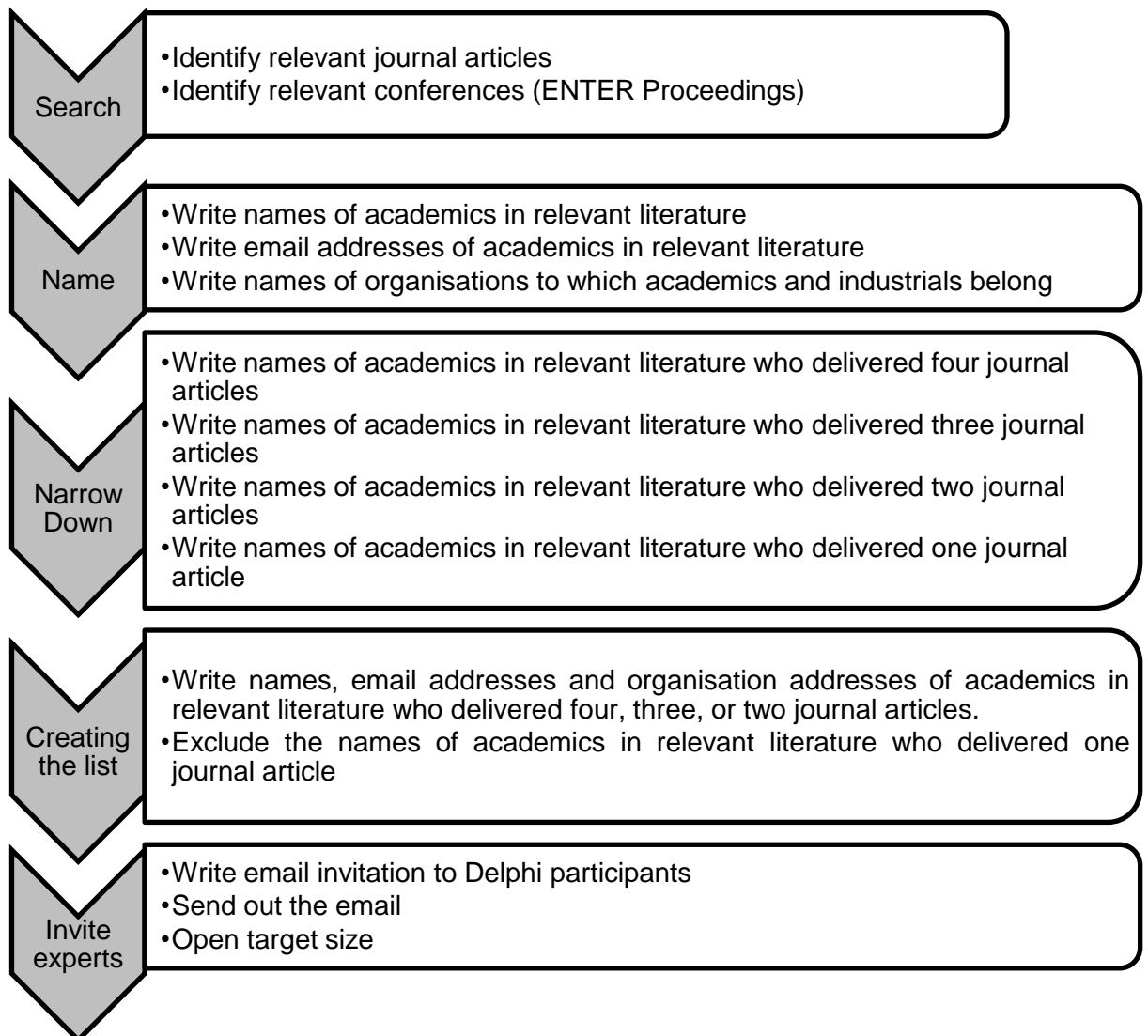


Figure 4.5 Process Used to Select the Panellists

d) Sample

For this study, a target of 50 individual experts from various electronic databases and conference proceedings was collated in order to invite them to participate in two or more rounds in this Delphi study (Appendix I). All those members who have been invited are experts in the field of DMS websites, destination websites, and website evaluation and destination website effectiveness.

To ensure the reliability of the decision made on selecting the experts, it was decided to enquire about this issue from the participants themselves. Therefore, the experts were asked in the final round about their knowledge level of website effectiveness and destination website measurement, and whether they consider themselves unfamiliar, casually acquainted, competent, advanced, or expert in this field of study.

e) Structure of the Questions

During the whole Delphi procedure, structured questions have been used. For example: 'Do you agree with these dimensions? Or do you think that these definition needs refining and modifying' (Round 1); or 'Please specify how strongly you agree/disagree with the following criteria' (Round 2). The answer options used for this question come from the 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree – strongly agree). In addition to that, a 'yes/no' answer format has also been used in some questions. For example 'In your opinion, should any of the criteria be removed from the list? Yes – No'. Participants have also been given the opportunity to justify their reasons for their choices. For instance, 'If you have answered "Yes" to Question 11 please explain your reasoning'. Furthermore, the panellists have also been given the opportunity to re-rate components on a scale of 1 (no relevance) to 5 (extremely relevant) (Round 3). For example: 'Please rate the components that you consider to be most relevant when evaluating the effectiveness of a DMS website evaluation'

After each Delphi round, feedback was made to inform the participants about the opinions and arguments of the other participants. The feedback, which includes new opinions or arguments, was inserted in the questionnaire survey rounds for further consensus feedback. This feedback, in a form of questionnaire, gave the panels the opportunity to react regarding the arguments of other participants and the decisions made by the researcher according to other participants' feedback. For example, the average scores were calculated as another element of feedback in the final round according to the outcomes of the second round. Consensus is defined as a 'general

agreement of a substantial majority' (Verhagen 1998), and in this study three Delphi rounds were considered sufficient to reach required consensus on the criteria and areas that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS website evaluation.

f) Actual Process

A descriptive research design was utilised to archive this objective because the panel experts were attempting to describe their knowledge in this specific field. The full Delphi study was accessed using both secure web-based survey tools, Bristol Online Survey (BOS) and Surveymonkey.com. The online delivery and panellist anonymity provided an efficient option for survey completion and data collection. After constructing the first round questionnaire, an invitation email was sent to Delphi participants (Appendix II). An attachment of research background was also attached in this email. The invitation email illustrated the method, objectives, times, and the panellists' roles. A link to the survey was inserted in the invitation email, giving the participants the opportunity to respond by clicking through to the link. Four weeks were provided for completion of the first round questionnaire. Participants who had not completed the first round questionnaire within the four weeks were given another chance to participate in the second round. Panel experts who excused themselves from participating were excluded from the panel participants list. The researcher, using tools of the web-based survey system, monitored the progress of the panel.

The following paragraphs provide descriptive guidelines for the three iteration rounds that have been used as a data collection technique to reach a final consensus regarding the aims of this Delphi study.

Round 1

Participants were asked in the first round of the Delphi to verify the main areas and criteria that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites. Round 1 was closed after four weeks of its launch. The results of this round were compiled within one week and Round 2 was administered within two weeks of the Round 1 results. The responses from the first round outcomes represented the independent thoughts of the participants and shaped the second round questionnaire. This was an important stage in the research in order to reach the aim of this study. The survey was designed online and was posted on a webpage through Bristol Online Survey (BOS). It was opened for four weeks to

gather as much data and responses as possible. Members of the panel were mailed a letter explaining the study and its purpose; the questionnaire and instructions on accessing and answering the survey were delivered electronically (Appendix III).

Round 2

The second round comprised the list of possible areas and criteria that should be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites, in addition to the added suggestions and recommendations from the panel members in the first round. Round 2 also included the responses feedback regarding these questions. A second email invitation (Appendix IV) was sent to panels to participate in the second round. The second email invitation restated briefly the aim and objectives of this research. The Bristol Online Survey (BOS) software was also used in this round to deliver the questionnaire to the participants via a link inserted with the second invitation email. Six weeks were provided for the completion of the second round questionnaire (Appendix II).

The second questionnaire round was designed to have a consensus on all the feedback that had been gathered from the experts in the first round. This round provided opinion on all items and questions compiled from the first round feedback. In this second round, these items and feedback were presented for a second chance. A five-point response scale was used to establish the consensus. For every item, the participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with including it in the final criteria list (5-point Likert scale). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', with any given recommendations. Participants were able to choose the items they considered to be essential for the criteria list. Participants were also given the opportunity to suggest alternative wording and to add extra items. Some items asked for the same information but were formulated differently.

Round 3

The results of the second round were compiled within two weeks and Round 3 was administered within three weeks of the Round 2 results. A third and final email (Appendix VI) was sent out to the participants to reach a final consensus regarding the questions that were asked in the first round. Surevymonkey.com software was used in in this final round to deliver the survey. Two months were provided for the completion of the final round; including the reminder email (Appendix VII). Compiled results from the second round and a questionnaire with feedback for each item were

presented to participants in this third questionnaire round. An average score was also calculated at this stage from the outcome of the second round to give the participants an in-depth view of the items listed in order to enhance the reliability of this study. The average scores were calculated for each item from the second Delphi panel response using the 5-point Likert scale, whereby participants were asked to re-rate their answers on a scale of 1 (no relevance) to 5 (extremely relevant) for a final review.

In response to the comments that appeared as an outcome of the second round questionnaire, participants were asked to re-rate their answers for items on which no consensus was obtained in the second round and for which the average score was less than 5. The aim of this re-rating was to reach a further discussion and final debate. Items on which consensus had been reached, and for which the average score was more than 5, feedback and recommendation were considered complete. This decision was made in order to save time and to make the questionnaire shorter and to reach the objective of the research. Sixteen panel members completed the third and final round.

4.4.1.5 Importance of the study findings

The results from the analysis and the comparison between the original responses of the expert panel have indicated that the number of selected experts utilised in this panel was sufficient to ensure reliability of the Delphi study and achieve the main aims. The findings are important because they establish the most recent of results from Delphi questionnaires conducted with qualified experts to explore and update the recent dimensions and criteria that the academic experts thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of DMS websites effectiveness. Additionally, these findings are also important for practitioners in the field of DMS websites evaluation as they update them with the most recent criteria and dimensions for evaluating the effectiveness of destination websites. Although the number of panellists was 16 (in the third and final round), utilisation of a similar number of experts in another field of study may be used with confidence and also achieve the aims of the objectives from the Delphi.

4.9.2 Destination Management Investigation

Reflexive critique is the process of becoming aware of perceptual biases. The reflexivity insists upon modest claims: making judgments depends on examples

from various destination management experiences, not on samples of universally agreed categories. The result of this will thus take the form of a dialogue between writers and readers concerning possible interpretations of experience, rather than a single interpretation thrust upon a passive reader by a writer expressing certainty. This process of questioning provides a dimension of validity. Showing, how a DMS websites evaluation and its effectiveness is grounded in reflexive, interpretative judgments, rather than external facts. The principle of reflective critique ensures people reflect on issues and processes and make explicit the interpretations, biases, assumptions and concerns upon which judgments are made. In this way, practical accounts in terms of the adopted DMS websites models for evaluation can give rise to theoretical considerations.

The next section of this thesis deals how destination management is evaluating their DMS websites. What approaches they use in addition to the criteria and dimensions they use when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites. To achieve this aim, structured interviews as well as online surveys were the main methods used to collect data in order to uncover the current “practical” view of this topic. The next section discusses these data methods in greater detail.

4.4.2.1 Structured interviews

One method of collecting data of this research was through interviews. The interviews were a useful data collection method during the exploratory stage of the research. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), interviewing is a useful data collection method for enabling respondents to provide detailed responses about complex issues. The main advantage of face-to-face interviews is that the researcher can clarify doubts through the interview (Sekaran and Bougie 2013). There are different types of interviews; the style of interview depends on the type of research aims and questions (Bryman and Bell 2007). Based on the degree of structure, interviews can be classified as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al. 2003). In unstructured interviews the researchers do not follow a list of questions. Unlike structured interviews, the questions in unstructured interviews are allowed to change during the interview. Moreover, the researcher can join the conversation by discussing what s/he thinks about the topic (Bryman and Bell 2007).

The type of the interviews conducted in this study was structured as the questions for the interviews were set and the information needed was known. A list of

predetermined questions to be asked to the respondents who had experience in a digital business environment and who were in charge of evaluating and assessing their destination websites. These people were interviewed during their attendance at ENTER conference organised by the International Federation for Information Technology and Travel and Tourism (IFITT). The ENTER conference offered a unique, worldwide forum for attendees from academic, industry, government, and other organisational background to actively exchange and share research and industrial case studies on the application of information and communication technologies in travel and tourism. Because of this suitability, the researcher decided to interview conference attendees and use their primary data in order to develop an online survey that would then sent out to different destinations based on different geographical locations.

The list of questions in these interviews included general questions about tourism destination websites and evaluation including questions such as: how they evaluate the effectiveness of their website; which tools and techniques they use for their evaluations; what dimensions and criteria they use when they evaluate their destination websites; from which perspective is the evaluation conducted, who undertakes the evaluation; how often they evaluate; what they do with the results; what forms their online presence take; what the purpose is for each one; what type of market they are trying to reach; how they promote their websites; and are there any factors that influence the approach they take when they evaluate.

The answers to these questions can be used as a guide to provide an overview on the current evaluation environment conducted within the industry. These questions were relevant to the second part of this thesis. During these interviews, the participants expressed their views and the responses were recording accurately on a recorder. However, due to limited length of the conference, the primary data was only collected from interviewing five participants (See Appendix VIII). These participants were representatives or in charge of the following five destination websites (Table 4.2);

Table 4.2 Tourism Destination Interviewes

Tourism Destination	URL
Slovenia	www.slovenia.info,
Norway	www.visitnorway.com
Ireland	www.discoverireland.ie
Melbourne	www.visitmelbourne.com
Vienna	www.vienna.info

The responses feedback from these interviews questions became the foundation that was used to develop an online survey that was later sent to other destinations based on different geographical locations. The main aim was to extract data from practitioners themselves in order to develop the destination online survey. The textual data derived from the interviews has then been analysed using an adapted content analysis approach. The primary interviews were analysed systematically and objectively by identifying special characteristics within them in order to construct identified categories. The next section illustrates the developed online survey.

4.4.2.2 Descriptive online survey

An online survey was another method of collecting data of this research. The aim of the survey was to obtain consistent answers in order to review the destination management practice section of this study. This online survey was an appropriate method as it was easy to administer and would target attain a consistent response rate as well as provide a considerable data relatively quickly (Blaxter et al. 2006). The online survey conducted in this study was descriptive in nature because it was designed mainly to find out exactly what approach industry use, and review what criteria and dimensions are used to evaluate their websites. A list of classified DMS websites was compiled first along with emails address of the mangers or those who are in charge of evaluating these websites. The list of these classified websites was found and gathered from official sources. The researcher decided to send this online survey to managers and heads of the official destination websites. This survey was sent out to various geographic locations. The list of the official tourism destination websites were obtained from the following sources (Table 4.3):

Table 4.3 Sources of the Official Tourism Destination Websites

Official Sources	URL
European Travel Commission	www.etc-corporate.org
European Cities Marketing	www.europeancitiesmarketing.com
Arab Organization for Tourism	www.arab-tourismorg.org
About Africa Travel Website	www.goafrica.about.com
Africa Information Website	www.africa.com
World Tourism Organization	www2.unwto.org/
Pacific Asia Travel Association	www.pata.org
The Tourism Industry Association of Ontario	www.tiaontario.ca
The U.S. Government's Official Web Portal	www.usa.gov/index.shtml
The official website of Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India	www.tourism.gov.in

From these official sources, more than 100 official tourism destination websites were found and contacted of which forty-six official tourism destinations agreed to participate in the survey (See Appendix X).

The online survey was made up of fifteen (15) questions: ten (10) multiple choice questions and five (5) open-ended questions. This questionnaire was based on the previous primary interviews and was sent out to those who are actually in the role of monitoring and evaluating their destination websites. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed for the open questions in the survey, in addition to the disaggregation of the data for the open-ended questions. The analysis was also undertaken to compare the findings from this survey with findings in existing literature in order to identify any gaps between the two perspectives (theory and practice). This was to see whether there are any gaps between the real evaluations used by destinations management (industrial) and the literature reviews (academic).

4.10 Quality of Research Design

Validity is the extent to which any measuring instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Creswell 2003). The content validity is 'the extent to which an empirical measurement reflects a specific domain of content'. To ensure content validity for the Delphi study, the elicited data was derived from a range of qualified academic experts' opinions in DMS website evaluation. Also, a pilot test was conducted to determine the suitability of the Delphi questionnaires. Furthermore, the careful design and time spent on the whole process of this study, delivery and collection of data, ensure the validity of this study.

To ensure content validity for the online survey, the destination managers' responses feedback from the structured interviews questions became the foundation that was used to develop this online survey. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted to determine the suitability of the survey. The researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure the questionnaire would be valid and reliable and the questionnaire is understandable and clear to the members of the target population. The pilot study was conducted inviting some of the Ph.D. students and academic staff from Queen Margaret University to participate in this pilot study and to provide their feedback. Furthermore, participants were asked to add any further comments or suggestions. Finally, minor adjustments were made on the basis of the responses from the pilot study. As a result, the researcher was able to confirm that the questionnaire was suitable and appropriate for the aims of the study.

The adoption of a reflexive stance has also enhanced and established researcher's credibility as a necessary element of research quality and as a means of making the researcher's position transparent.

The reliability of results has been also ensured in this research. The Delphi study ensured anonymity and unbiased answers from experts in the field, free from peer group and interviewer pressures. In this research, the participant's academic experts represented the most qualified experts in the area of DMS websites evaluations; some of the experts have had more than twenty years of experience in the field of study. Furthermore, the median was calculated in the third-round questionnaire, so participants took this into consideration in cases where there was a degree of disagreement among them, and this helped to ascertain whether the nature of the disagreement was real or only because of the semantics of the items. The panels

were also limited to DMS website evaluations with a process cycle time of approximately seven to nine months to reduce the amount of variability.

The anonymity of participants in the Delphi experts study and, the destination management section provides them with the opportunity to freely express opinions and positions and this leads to creativity, honesty and the balanced consideration of ideas (Akins et al. 2005; Iqbal and Pison-Young 2009). The anonymity allows consensus to take place without the influence of personality or persuasive speaking. The idea or the suggestion may be biased by those who introduced it if anonymity is not ensured. Furthermore, no one will be embarrassed or feel exposed if the idea is deemed unsuitable (Stitt-Gohdes and Crews 2005). All of these factors will enhance the reliability of the results for this research.

4.11 Ethical considerations

The principle of research ethics is that participants should not be harmed in any way as a result of participating in the research and that participants give informed consent to participate (Bowling 2002). This research was granted ethical approval by the QMU Ethics committee in December 2010. The need for confidentiality and anonymity are important considerations when undertaking research with people, as they need to be assured that their right to privacy has been safeguarded (Parahoo 1997).

The contributions of the academic experts and practitioners to this study remain anonymous, and the researcher is the only person with access to the names and contact details of the panellists, along with all data provided throughout this study. Confidentiality remains critical throughout the whole study, keeping participant information confidential and anonymous. All results were available to participants but did not include any identifying content or names, other than random feedback responses. The geographic dispersion of the panellist and the use of electronic communication, i.e. email, to solicit and exchange information have enhanced the issue of confidentiality.

All structured interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed once written consent had been gained. The right to privacy was safeguarded by all participants being given a numeric identifier known only to the researcher. All tape-recordings and transcripts were kept secure in a locked cabinet within a lockable room.

4.12 Conclusion

The research methodology was underpinned by the philosophical approach of social constructionism, and used a discursive, reflective approach to provide new dimensions to the body of knowledge in the tourism industry. Methods used within the research were literature searching over several periods of time using several academic tourism and information systems databases; Delphi study; structured interviews; online survey and critical reflection. Data collection occurred following the gaining of ethical approval, with enrolment of qualified experts and destination managers from different geographical area. Data analysis was undertaken according to areas of agreement and disagreement regarding Delphi study, and a content analysis approach, for structured interviews and online survey analysis with links and cross-links identified between different concepts areas emerging from the data to generate categories of similarity.

Influence of the researcher on the research was recognised and acknowledge through the use of social constructionism, with attention paid to the need for transparency of reflexivity as a means of engendering rigour in the research. Reflexivity happened between the data derived from both perspectives (the academic and destination management) and analysing it.

The intention of the research is to gain an understanding of the contemporary thinking on DMS website evaluation from both academic and destination management's perspectives therefore, the following four chapters analyse the data results and explore the research findings. Finally a seventh discussion and the eighth convulsion chapter draw together the main elements of the research and the continuation of this study to the knowledge in the area of DMS website evaluation.

Chapter 5: **Delphi Study Results-Academic Perspective**

5.1 Introduction

Most researchers agree on the fact that it is important to have a specific set of criteria in place in order to evaluate tourism websites. Therefore, the aim of this Delphi study was to identify and consolidate an array of the most recent and updated dimensions and criteria that the expert panel thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS website.

The results of this study have been sorted and analysed according to areas of agreement and disagreement regarding the questionnaires. The average score, mode, median and STD deviation for each item was calculated. The panellists did not respond to all stages and some only responded to Round 1 or 2. Only seven panel members (7) participated in the first round. Twenty-two (22) responded in the second round, and sixteen (16) panel experts responded in the final and third round. The rest of the potential participants declined in the first, second and third rounds with no answer; the researcher has assumed that the lack of response was due to lack of time for those experts. Based on the findings in the third stage, about 80% of the specialists were men and about 20% of them were women. About 60% of them were at expert level, and 40% were at other levels. To analyse the collected data, the author applied descriptive statistical methods.

5.2 Definition of Destination Management System (DMS)

5.2.1 Round I: Definition of DMS

The aim of first question in this round is to reach a final and latest definition regarding the Destination Management System (DMS). The definition was taken from the latest study about destination website effectiveness (Horan and Frew 2010). The participants were asked in the first question in this round about their opinion regarding the latest updated definition of DMS. They were asked whether the current definition is appropriate or whether it needs refining or modifying. They were also asked if there are other points that should be added to the current definition of DMS. Only seven panel members participated in the first round. However, the researcher decided to give another chance for the panelists who declined in this round to participate in the second round. The definition that was provided to the members in the first round was:

Destination Management Systems (DMS) are systems that consolidate and distribute a comprehensive range of tourism products through a variety of channels and platforms, generally catering for a specific region, and supporting the activities of a destination management organization (DMO) within that region. DMS attempts to utilise a customer-centric approach in order to manage and market a destination as a holistic entity, typically providing strong destination-related information, real-time reservations, and destination management tools and paying particular attention to supporting small and independent tourism suppliers (Horan 2010).

Table 5.1 Definition of a Destination Management System

Definition Components	Respondents Percentage
The definition is appropriate and comprehensive	98%
The definition needs modifying	2%

The new point or suggestions that were raised among the panel experts who suggested that this definition needs modifying were:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an explanation as to how the DMS collects data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include an explanation as to how the DMS maintains and distributes data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the term 'an effective DMS is a critical part of the customer journey towards identifying, selecting and visiting a destination' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the scope and strategic aims of DMS, as well as its nature and entity, rather than its functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include marketing functions such as CRM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include awareness about ownership and control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include distribution functions such as transactional functionality and office tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the term 'an integral component of the destination marketing strategy'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include some requirement on the quality of the content searching services supplied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how it differs from other forms of online distribution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include the term 'inter-organisational systems' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the variety of products on offer

Figure 5.1 New Proposed Updated Definition Components

These new inputs would be an addition to the original definition of DMS, but this needs an agreement from the participants regarding the inclusion of one or more of these items.

5.2.2 Round II: Definition of DMS

In Round I of the Delphi study participants were asked to identify a proposed definition of DMS and make any supplements that they believed were proper.

Twelve (12) new proposed components and additions were gathered and characterised in this second questionnaire. Again, participants were invited to offer further revision regarding these proposed supplements. The participants were also giving the opportunity to give reasons for their decisions and opinions. The findings from the definition section of Round 2 and new proposed items are presented in the following table:

Table 5.2 New Updated Definition Components

New Updated Definition Components	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
Include an explanation as to how the DMS collects data	3.40	3	3	.854
Include an explanation as to how the DMS maintains and distributes data	3.45	3.5	4	.857
Include marketing functions such as CRM	4.04	4	4	.785
Focus on the scope and strategic aims of DMS as well as its nature and entity rather than its function	3.72	4	3	.882
Include some requirement on the quality of the content searching services supplied	3.72	4	4	.935
Include the term 'an integral component of the destination marketing strategy'	3.86	4	4	.833
Include the term 'an effective DMS is a critical part of the customer journey towards identifying, selecting and visiting a destination'	3.80	3	3	1.011
Include awareness about ownership and control	3.77	4	4	.812
Explain how it differs from other forms of online distribution	3.77	4	4	.922
Include distribution functions such as transactional functionality and office tasks	3.68	4	4	.779
Include the term 'inter-organisational systems'	3.40	3	3	.734
Expand the variety of products on offer	3.59	4	3a	1.098

5.2.3 Round III: Definition of DMS

Items on which consensus was obtained were excluded from this question (where average – the mean– was more than 4). The excluding process was carried out in order to save time, and to make the questionnaire shorter in response to the comments in the second round. In this round, panel experts were asked to re-rate their answers for items on which no consensus was obtained in the second round and for which the average score was less than 4. (It has been decided to use the number 4 as an average score because, when analysing the results from the second-round questionnaire using the SPSS, the five-point response scale was coded as follows: Strongly disagree = 1; Disagree = 2; Neutral = 3; Agree = 4; Strongly Agree = 5. So the re-rating, in this case 4, was adopted for all items for which the participants felt a moderate response or which they disagreed with.) The findings from the definition section of Round 3 and new non-consensus items are presented in the following table:

Table 5.3 Items on which the Participants Showed No Consensus

A Definition of a Destination Management System (DMS) should:	Rating Average
include the term 'inter-organisational systems'	3.00
include the following wording: 'an effective DMS is a critical part of the customer journey towards identifying, selecting and visiting a destination'	3.86
include some requirement on the quality of the content supplied by searching services	3.44
include the following wording: 'an integral component of the destination marketing strategy'	3.69
include an explanation of how the DMS maintains and distributes data	2.69
expand the variety of products on offer	3.38

There were also some new suggestions proposed by the participants in the second round about the components of a DMS definition. Participants were asked to rate these components and give any comments they thought were applicable. The

findings from these new suggestions for the definition section are presented in the following table:

Table 5.4 Items on which the Participants Suggested Additions to the Definition

A definition of a Destination Management System (DMS) should:	Rating Average
'include social networking with perspective in communication/distribution to customers'	3.50
'support tourists during all phases of consumption: mobility and post-consumption (re-experiencing + double-way connection with social media)'	4.13
'be a tool helping to create unique destination products by teaming with the suppliers of the region'	3.63

From the findings in the three Delphi questionnaires, we can see that, although these new suggestions items are important, it has been decided not to include any of them in the definition of DMS as they rated less than 4. In other words, no essential changes to the original definition of DMS are needed. However, there is a rising emergence of social media as the new important component related to DMS.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media are anything where users can participate, create, and share content. They distinguish the following social media: blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Social media also include forums, ratings, reviews, social networking sites, micro-blogging sites, pod-casts and video-casts and photo sharing sites (FPRM 2009). In the last years, social media functionality was commonly incorporated into mobile applications. It is not the unique function of web anymore; Smartphones are becoming the most important social media devices. (Kiráľová and Pavlíčka 2014).

The number of social media users around the globe has risen by 18% in 2013 (SMT 2013). Nearly 25 % of people in the world now use social media. By 2017, the number of social media users should rise to 2.33 billion (Statista 2014). Stikky Media (2014) found that in 2013 eighty-two million people have downloaded a TripAdvisor application, 2.800 new topics were posted every day to the TripAdvisor

forums. TripAdvisor shows more than 150 million reviews from over 60 million members worldwide and has 1.23 billion monthly active users as of December 2013. Facebook states 945 million monthly users of mobile products and total 300 million photos uploads per day.

The benefit of social media and their effectiveness to destinations can be seen especially in an increase in brand awareness, brand engagement, word of mouth, friends/liking, trust and social validation (Kiráľová and Pavlíčka 2014). Destinations have used social media as a promotional tool for interactive marketing purposes, but the constant rise of visitors that use social media applications creates new challenges for all industry (Schmallegger and Carson 2008). Using social media visitors can gather information first-hand from other visitors and make decisions about the destination or the experience. Information gathering is possible through blogging, experience sharing; story writing that can be published on personal internet site of visitors, the destination's site, or a networked site.

Visit Florida, the Florida State's official tourism marketing corporation, launched its integrated social media summer marketing campaign "Sunshine Moments" in 2011. This campaign has focused on reaching families through geo-targeted digital advertising on Facebook, Yahoo and several other key social media. The Facebook campaign encouraged participants to upload their favourite Florida vacation images to Visit Florida's Facebook page, where followers could vote for their favourite photo. The campaign showed a 10-point increase in intent to visit Florida and a significantly improved opinion among the state's key demographic of 25-34 year olds.

The feedback from the experts showed that social media could be linked to DMS in terms of its communication/distribution to customers. If this is the case, new fields or perspectives should be taken into consideration when launching or assisting the effectiveness of a DMS. This underscores the need for strategic and integrated planning, together with the selective use of specific tools and techniques to be evaluated. This also raises questions as to how social media could be evaluated as a crucial element in the whole DMS effectiveness process: will it be evaluated as part of a specific domino, such as a distribution channel, or will it be integrated with all tools and instruments? Ultimately, how can it play role in increasing the effective

performance of a DMS, and how can a DMS benefit from it? All of this leads to another idea, that the new social media will play a major role in Destination Management System websites effectiveness.

5.3 Destination Management System Aims

5.3.1 Round I: Aims of a DMS

The panel experts were asked in the second question of the first-round questionnaire to give their opinions regarding the aims of DMS. They were giving a list of aims that have been derived from the most recent research by Horan Frew (2010). They were asked about their opinions regarding these aims, and whether there are any new updated aims for DMS that they see as important enough to add to the list of aims. The aims of the Destination Management System that were provided to the members in the first round are:

1. to effectively co-ordinate the marketing activities and branding of a specific destination and the comprehensive range of products it has to offer
2. to provide timely, accurate, unbiased, quality-assured destination and product-based information (both accommodation and non-accommodation)
3. to facilitate the effective distribution and sale of a comprehensive range of tourism products from a destination
4. to present the destination as a holistic entity displaying a destination orientation rather than a product orientation
5. to provide an appropriate and sustainable relationship building mechanisms with customers through effective, meaningful and continuous communication
6. to increase the satisfaction level of its suppliers, the local community and all of its stakeholders (to build and maintain a meaningful relationship with it stakeholders)
7. to facilitate the management of a destination by supporting DMO activities and through the provision of tools, support and training for its stakeholders

Table 5.5 Aims of a Destination Management System

Definition Components	Respondents Percentage
The aims are appropriate and comprehensive	98%
There are new aims that should be added to the list	2%

The new aims or suggestions that were raised among the panel experts were as follows, in Figure 6.2.

• cover costs	• support the collection of tourism data
• support sustainable destination management	• support the collection of tourism satellite accounts
• enable collaboration at the destination	• empower and support tourism firms
• provide something on ROI	• capture consumer data
• enable tourism firms in tourism destination governance	• increase consumer satisfaction levels i.e. consumer data

Figure 5.2 New Proposed Aims for DMS

Again, these new inputs would be an addition to the original aims of DMS, but an agreement is needed from the participants regarding the inclusion of one or more of these items to the list of aims of the Destination Management System (DMS).

5.3.2 Round II: Aims of a DMS

From the feedback from the first round questionnaire, ten new aims have been suggested by the participants to be added to the latest list of aims of the Destination Management System (DMS). In the second-round questionnaire the panellists were asked to say whether they agree or disagree with these being added to the list. They were also given the opportunity to add any further suggestions or recommendations. The findings from the aims of DMS the second Round 2 and new proposed items (from the feedback of the second questionnaire) are presented in Figure 5.2. From the following table we notice that the standard deviation is low, and this indicates that the data is not that far from the mean. In other words, this data is close to the mean. Ultimately, that shows a high consensus regarding these items.

Table 5.6 Proposed New Aims for DMS

Proposed New Aims for DMS	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
cover costs	3.13	3	3	.833
support sustainable destination management	4.09	4	4	.683
empower and support tourism firms	4.04	4	4	.785
enable collaboration at the Destination	4.27	4	4	.550
enable tourism firms in tourism destination governance	3.81	4	4	.795
support the collection of tourism data	4.18	4	4	.906
support the collection of tourism satellite accounts	3.45	4	3.5	.962
provide something on ROI	3.68	4	4	.838
capture consumer data	4.13	4	4	.774
increase consumer satisfaction levels	4.04	4	4	.843

5.3.3 Round III: Aims of a DMS

Participants in Round 3 were asked to re-rate the items that they considered to be most relevant for inclusion in a definition of a DMS. Average scores have been calculated in this questionnaire and were presented to the panellists. All items with an average score of less than 4 have been included in this round's questionnaire to give them another chance to reach a final consensus on whether or not to add them to the aims of DMS. All items with an average score of more than 4 have been excluded, and consensus was considered as being reached for them. The findings of this round are shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7 Items on which the Participants Showed No Consensus

Aims of a Destination Management System	Rating Average
cover costs	3.06
enable tourism firms in tourism destination governance	3.25
support the collection of tourism satellite accounts	3.25
provide something on ROI	3.38

Again, as the average rating for these items is less than 4, it has been decided not to include them in the list of aims of the DMS. However, according to the results of the Round 3 questionnaire, the new additions aims of the DMS are the aims that the average score was above 4.

- support sustainable destination management
- empower and support tourism firms
- enable collaboration at the destination
- increase consumer satisfaction level
- capture consumer data

Figure 5.3 New Additions to the Aims of DMS

1. DMS support sustainable destination management:

DMS represent the digital platforms which provide the functionality and the services for synthesizing and meeting the needs of all destination stakeholders as well as for e-empowering those to better achieve their operations in a sustainable way (Sigala 2009). Achieving sustainability always refers to the achievement of the major economical, social-cultural, and environmental development. DMS can substantially contribute to these sustainable goals by supporting and fostering the economic development of the destination by empowering tourism firms to exploit and use ICTs

for ecommerce in order to reduce their expenses (e.g. distribution costs and commission). DMS can globally e-promoting the destination, creating and e-disseminating its image, and resources in order to attract more tourism demand and increase tourism spending at the destination (Sigala 2009).

Furthermore, DMS can support the implementation of social-cultural goal by creating an electronic platform that enable the local community and travellers to meet and communicate with each other, exchange and share their cultural values and interests. It can overcome cultural misunderstanding and achieve a better cultural mix by interpreting the heritage resources of the destination, and enabling the local community to actively engage in the creation and promotion of the destination image and resources (Sigala 2009). DMS can also inform tourists about all the geographically dispersed tourism resources in destinations, so that tourists visit wider geographical areas, and do not concentrate and stay in all-inclusive resorts. Therefore, DMS can reduce seasonality, and support regional development by enhancing the socioeconomic development and the quality of life of citizens located at peripheral areas (Sigala 2009).

DMS can increase the competitiveness of the destination by attracting more investors to increase their entrepreneurship activity. It provides and creates employment opportunities. DMS can even support e-democracy by providing the local community with the tools and the ways to participate in the tourism development policy making and implementation processes. DMS publish related material aiming to educate and make the community aware of the current situation and problems, and provide a platform for gathering, consolidating and synthesizing different stakeholders' voices for designing and implementing tourism development strategies (Sigala 2009).

2. DMS empower and support tourism firms:

The advent of the internet opened a whole new range of possibilities to individual tourism firms and to destinations as a whole. According to Buhalis (2003), the internet brought some key innovations, such as 'melting' down geographical barriers in both B2B and B2C perspectives, which enhanced the capacity of tourism firms to act at a global level with much less financial costs.

DMS has had a dramatic impact in the operation, structure and strategy of tourism firms (Petti and Passiante 2009). It has had enhanced the visibility of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) through diminishing their dependency on external intermediaries and, allowing them to reach higher revenues (Ndou and Petti 2007). DMS has also allowed tourism firms, to improve their offline connectivity, i.e. collaboration, clustering as well as intersect oral linkages among public and private tourism and tourism-related actors (Petti and Passiante 2009). Therefore, it has helped in generating income not only for the destination management organizations, but also, for the SMTEs through reservations and other value added services.

The development of an inter organizational infrastructure in form of DMS and associated electronic networking of the services open up new possibility of cooperation in marketing, sales and services” (Fux and Myrach 2009 p. 507). SMTEs support a range of benefits for destinations (target place) by offering tourists direct contact with the local character and also by facilitating rapid infusion of spending into the host community, simulating multiplier effects. Therefore, the development and operation of DMS has helped SMTEs to boost their financial capability.

3. DMS enable collaboration at the destination:

DMS provide a platform that can support and foster the collaboration and networking of tourism firms. The fast changing and sophisticated consumer demand force tourism firms to engage in collaborative strategies in order to ensure not only competitiveness but also survival (Sigala 2013). It is widely advocated that the development of collaborative e-marketing strategies can empower small and medium firms to collaboratively address their limitations in exploiting new technologies (Halvorson et al. 2012; Sigala 2013). However, evidence in the tourism literature shows that many DMS have failed to deliver the expected outcomes, mainly because of the disagreement of the DMS members on the definition and the measurement of the DMS roles (Sigala and Marinidis 2012; Sigala 2013).

Research has failed to investigate issues related to the performance of inter-firm collaborative practices (Boonstra et al. 2008; Sigala 2013). The provision of

information about the performance of collaborative practices to all collaborating stakeholders is of vital importance, as stakeholders tend to possess different and/or conflicting interests, motivations, values and perceptions about their cooperation (e.g. Frew and Horan 2007; Robey et al. 2008). In order to better understand these issues, researchers have to start studying DMS from a whole industry and not individual firm perspective, and to consider and investigate the influence of the stakeholders' perceptions and their social context on the DMS management issues (Sigala 2013).

4. DMS increase consumer satisfaction level:

These platforms are networks linking the DMO to the whole range of destination suppliers (e.g., hotels, restaurants) and, at the same time, actively engage with the potential tourist demand (Estêvão et al. 2014). They recognised the potential of the internet to increase the opportunities of contact with consumers and to do that at a substantially lower cost. DMS encompass not only informational functionalities, but also a whole set of functionalities, including, those that enable the purchase of goods and services through the website. They provide leadership within the local, regional or national tourism system, and provide some facilities and services to visitors, such as tourism information offices, which complement the hospitality sector's offerings and enhance visitors' satisfaction levels towards the destination (Estêvão et al. 2014).

5. DMS capture consumer data:

DMS assist the visitors' experience before, during and after the visit (Gretzel et al. 2006). They provide information for tourists, and promote the destination's image at local, regional or national levels (Choi et al. 2007). DMS assist visitors in their search stage, providing information on flights, accommodations, maps and directions, weather attractions (Crouch 2007). After the decision has been taken, visitors tend to acquire more specific information on concrete suppliers and could purchase tourism services in other types of web platforms, or the suppliers' own websites (Choi et al. 2007). DMS provide what has been called an information and reservations systems allowing, and they assist destinations to jointly and coherently capture visitor data, and promote offerings to them (Estêvão et al. 2014).

5.4 Destination Websites Effectiveness Dimensions

5.4.1 Round I: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions

Panel members were asked during Round 1 about the areas that they think should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of destination websites. The aim from the first round was to collect as many dimensions in order to update or refine the existing ones. The findings are shown in Figure 5.4

• Visibility	• Content
• Conversion Rates	• Design and Navigation
• Amount of Visitors	• Customer Centricity
• Usability	• Performance
• Persuasiveness	• Commerce
• Marketing	• Value of Trip
• Management	• Visitor Expenditure
• Sustainability	• Goals of the Website
• Tourism Governance	• Communication with Visitors
• Collaboration Issues	• ROI

Figure 5.4 Proposed Destination Management Systems Evaluation Dimensions

5.4.2 Round II: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions

The purpose of the second Delphi round was to allow panelists to check and upgrade overall responses to each question. This enables consent between participants on all of the dimensions that have been gathered in the first round questionnaire. The findings from the second round are shown in Table 5.8

Table 5.8 Proposed Evaluation Dimensions for DMS Statistics

Effectiveness Dimensions	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Visibility	4.63	5	5	.492
Conversion Rates	3.90	4	4	.867
Amount of Visitors	4.31	4	4	.567
Usability	4.45	4.5	5	.595
Persuasiveness	4.13	4	4	.774
Marketing	4.40	4	4	.590
Management	4.04	4	4	.653
Sustainability	4	4	4	.816
Tourism Governance	3.68	4	3	.838
Collaboration Issues	4.04	4	4	.722
ROI	3.59	4	4	.908
Content	4.36	4	4	.727
Design and Navigation	4.27	4	5	.827
Customer Centricity	4.27	4	5	.827
Performance	4.22	4	4	.685
Commerce	3.77	4	4	.922
Value of Trip	3.72	4	4	.935
Visitor Expenditure	3.68	4	4	.716
Goals of the Website	4.09	4	4	.811
Communication with Visitors	4.22	4	4	.812

5.4.3 Round III: Destination websites effectiveness dimensions

Items on which consensus was obtained were excluded from this question (where average – the mean – was more than 4). The excluding process was carried out in order to save time, and to make the questionnaire shorter in response to the comments in the second round. In this round, panel experts were asked to re-rate their answers for items on which no consensus was obtained in the second round and for which the average score was less than 4. The findings from the Round 3 and new non-consensus items are presented in the following table.

Table 5.9 Dimensions on which the Participants Showed No Consensus

Destination Websites Evaluation Dimensions	Rating Average
Conversion Rates	3.90
Tourism Governance	3.68
ROI	3.59
Commerce	3.77
Value of Trip	3.72
Visitor Expenditure	3.68

Finally, when the panel was asked if there were some additions/amendments that they would like to make to proposed effectiveness areas, all respondents expressed total satisfaction with the areas provided. However, according to the results of the Round 3 questionnaire, the new additions aims with the average score above 4.

- Sustainability
- Marketing
- Collaboration Issues
- Goals of the Website.

Figure 5.5 New Additions to the DMS Dimensions

1. Sustainability

DMS support the achievement of long-term economic benefits and maintain travellers' loyalty to the destination. Therefore, it increases the average spending per tourist at the destination; spreading economic benefits to diverse tourism stakeholders irrespective of their size and geography location (Sigala 2009). It also contributes to the development of the local culture; it helps tourists to adopt a more social responsible behaviour for respecting and understanding the local culture. DMS can help in the exploitation of physical and earth's resources for

gathering resources to preserve their nature without destroying them for usage by future generations (Sigala 2009).

Measuring the sustainability as new a dimension for DMS evaluation could be an overwhelming task. Part of designing a framework for evaluation means thinking about the data needed to monitor this framework. Destination must be asked what they want to know. This would be an opportune time for them to reflect on the concept of sustainability. Reflecting on questions in the context of sustainability will help destination to identify the types of information they need to collect. Key stakeholders, board members, program staff, visitors and others should be involved in such evaluation, and be informed of the evaluation findings. Designing a comprehensive, but focused data-collection evaluation framework is the key to evaluate sustainability.

2. Marketing

According to Wang and Russo (2007), DMS should develop and provide marketing services and functionalities of four dimensions: The information, communication, transaction, and virtual relationship dimensions. The development of information space refers to the creation, maintenance, management and publication of the website's content (Wang and Russo 2007). It is a combination of functional information and motivating visuals that encourage the user to plan a trip to the destination. In other words, multimedia information (including text, photographs, videos, live webcams, 3D pictures, videos etc.) should be assessed as well as the emotional and social informational needs of travellers (Wang and Russo 2007).

The evaluation of communication space entails first the identification of the stakeholders to be targeted with the marketing communication and then, the identification and selection of the communication types and the media to be used for evaluating this communication. What type of communication that use several media (e.g. call me back options, e-mail, blogs, newsletters, chat, and promotion of the website to search engines) should be assessed.

DMS should have tool that enable online bookings and transactions. The major functionality that such a booking engine should be evaluated and assessed according to features include: secure online transactions, privacy policy and technology to guarantee the appropriate collection, storage and analysis of personal data, multiple payment options, e.g. many credit cards, paypal, money transfer, debit cards etc (Wang and Russo 2007).

The operation of a loyalty scheme is always one of the major components of a Customer Relationship Management (e)-CRM strategy. The major impacts of this scheme are: increased loyalty of travellers to the whole destination. The major functionality that such a (e)-CRM strategy should be evaluated and assessed according to features include e-mail newsletters; special offers/best buys; direct e-mail campaigns; free news updates; personalisation/customization services; incentive programs; upselling opportunities; and social community functions (Wang and Russo 2007).

3. Collaboration Issues

The provision of information about the performance of collaborative practices to all collaborating stakeholders is of vital importance, as stakeholders tend to possess different and/or conflicting interests, motivations, values and perceptions about their cooperation (e.g. Frew and Horan 2007; Robey et al. 2008). In order to better assess these issues, researchers should first start studying DMS from a whole industry and not individual firm perspective, and to consider and investigate the influence of the stakeholders' perceptions and their social context on the DMS management issues (Sigala 2013).

4. Goals of the Website

Measuring the effectiveness of DMS with the goals and metrics identified, are necessary steps that will reveal how well destinations are attaining those goals. DMS effectiveness depends on how well a website performs with respect to the organization's objectives (Horan 2010). Measuring everything possible in the hope of finding something that is of value is not cost-effective. However, it is much more effective to focus on measuring what really matters to the destination: optimizing the design and the navigation, for instance, or maximizing revenue and return-on-

investment. Improving customer relationships or brand building may be addressed too. Each strategic and marketing objective requires a specific approach and the studying of specific metrics. If the main goal is revenue, for example, the factors that stimulate the customer to buy must be identified. Subsequently, the results are analyzed to understand the events that lead to these results.

5.5 Destination Websites Effectiveness Criteria

5.5.1 Round I: Destination management system effectiveness criteria

Panel members were asked during Round 1 about the areas that they think should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS website. The aim from the first round was to collect as many criteria in order to update or refine the existing ones. The findings are shown in Figure 5.6.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how many people visited the website • how many converted to visitors • how visible are the websites on major search engines • all majors that have been developed from a consumer perspective • the needs of the small tourism providers it is supposed to support • bookings • promotions • destination awareness • tourist satisfaction • destination loyalty • destination image • persuasiveness • objective and subjective criteria • conversion levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultivate customer relationship • customer satisfaction • identify target markets • personalisation • reaching target market • stakeholder satisfaction • achievement of DMS aims • added value • barriers to entry-exit • channel integration • depends on DMO aims • internal level of integration • no. of partners • ownership of inventory • supplier feedback • type of partners • visitors to destination
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- | | |
|---|--|
| • reservations | • acquisition costs |
| • sales | • average costs of different behaviours |
| • what were the main reasons for visiting | • balanced cost of participation |
| • to what extent did the DMS actually influence the decision to visit | • cost per reservation |
| • stickiness | • internal returns |
| • click-through % | • transaction cost suppliers |
| • impact on destination brand | • geographical spread |
| • promotion | • percentage of suppliers getting visits |
| • SEO | • reach percentage |
| • reduce perception gap | • traffic |
| • accuracy (content) | • visitor sessions |
| • content quality | • volume of hits |
| • freshness – up-to-date | • volume of page views |
| • comprehensive product range | • volume of visitors – reach |
| • content | • acquisition |
| • content comprehensiveness | • abandonment |
| • intelligibility of text | • attrition |
| • product comparison | • conversion change percentage |
| • focus | • new registrations |
| • percentage of supplier participation | • no. of logins |
| • range of content providers | • no. of registered users |
| • content uniqueness | • offline conversion |
| • knowledge creation | • online conversion |
| • absence of errors | • total conversion |
| • cost of sales | • churn |
| • cost per contact | • retention |
| • customer interaction | • frequency |
| • customer recollection | • loyalty |
| • demand forecasting | • volume of revisits |
| • multiple language | • seamlessness |

• no. of emails volunteered	• speed of response
• return on investment	• DMS % of overall sales
• value added features	• dynamic packaging
• slipperiness	• percentage of suppliers getting bookings
• accessibility	• real-time availability
• aesthetics	• reservation effectiveness
• findability	• reservation for non-accommodation
• length of stay	• secure transaction
• privacy	• value of sales
• usability – suppliers' perspective	• value of visitors
• usability (inc. navigation)	• volume of sales
• use of graphics	
• usefulness	
• 24-7, 365-day operation	
• integration with suppliers systems	• catering for target markets
• interoperability	• seamlessness
• regional-national integration	• speed of response
• reliability	• DMS % of overall sales
• robustness	• dynamic packaging
• value of sales	• percentage of suppliers getting bookings
• value of visitors	• real-time availability
• volume of sales	• secure transaction
• catering for target markets	• reservation effectiveness
• reservation for non-accommodation	

Figure 5.6 Proposed DMS Website Evaluation Criteria

5.5.2 Round II: Destination management system effectiveness criteria

There were a number of areas that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS. These evaluations areas were identified by the participants in Round 1 of the Delphi study. Participants were asked in this round's questionnaire to specify how strongly they agree or disagreed with these areas of effectiveness in order to come to an agreement about the evaluation of DMS website effectiveness

areas. The findings from the second-round questionnaire regarding this question are shown in Table 5.10. These new criteria would be an addition to the original criteria of DMS website, but this again needs an agreement from the participants regarding the inclusion of one or more of these criteria

Table 5.10 Proposed Evaluation Criteria for DMS Websites Statistics

Proposed Evaluation Criteria	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
how many people visited the website	4.5	5	5	.597
how many converted to visitors	4.54	5	5	.670
how visible are the websites on major search engines	4.72	5	5	.455
all majors that have been developed from a consumer perspective	3.90	4	4	.750
the needs of the small tourism providers it is supposed to support	3.90	4	4	.683
bookings	4.22	5	4	.869
promotions	4.13	5	4	.833
destination awareness	4.40	4	4	.590
tourist satisfaction	4.09	5	4	.921
destination loyalty	3.63	4	4	.953
destination image	4.18	4a	4	.852
persuasiveness	3.95	4	4	.722
objective and subjective criteria	3.72	4	4	.827
conversion levels	4.27	4	4	.631
reservations	4.13	5	4	.940
sales	4.18	5	4	.906
what were the main reasons for visiting	3.81	4	4	.852
to what extent did the DMS actually influence the decision to visit	4.27	4	4	.702
stickiness	3.68	3	3.5	.779
click-through %	3.90	4	4	.683
impact on destination brand	4.13	4	4	.833
promotion	4.22	4	4	.611
SEO	4.36	5	4.5	.726
reduce perception gap	3.63	3	4	1.04

Proposed Evaluation Criteria	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
accuracy (content)	4.36	4	4	.581
content quality	4.5	5	5	.597
freshness – up-to-date	4.36	4a	4	.657
comprehensive product range	4.04	4	4	.722
content	4.27	4	4	.702
content comprehensiveness	4.18	4	4	.732
intelligibility of text	4.04	4	4	.575
product comparison	3.86	4	4	.774
focus	3.90	4	4	.683
percentage of supplier participation	3.90	4	4	.867
range of content providers	3.81	4	4	.795
content uniqueness	3.81	4	4	.501
knowledge creation	3.59	4	4	.590
absence of errors	4.04	4	4	.785
cost of sales	3.77	4	4	.812
cost per contact	3.77	4	4	.812
customer interaction	4	4	4	.816
customer recollection	3.77	4	4	.751
demand forecasting	3.72	4	4	1.03
multiple language	4	4	4	.755
no. of emails volunteered	3.77	4	4	.751
return on investment	3.45	3	3	.670
value added features	3.63	3a	4	.657
slipperiness	3.40	3	3	.734
accessibility	4.09	4	4	.526
aesthetics	4.09	4	4	.610
findability	4.04	4	4	.653
length of stay	3.77	3a	4	.869
privacy	4	4	4	.755
usability – suppliers' perspective	4.04	4	4	.653
usability (inc. navigation)	4.18	4	4	.588
use of graphics	3.86	4	4	.710

Proposed Evaluation Criteria	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
usefulness	4.04	4	4	.653
24-7, 365-day operation	4.22	5	4.5	.869
integration with suppliers systems	4	4	4	.617
interoperability	4.04	4	4	.575
regional-national integration	4.09	4	4	.610
reliability	4.18	4	4	.664
robustness	4	4	4	.690
seamlessness	3.90	4	4	.683
speed of response	4.18	4	4	.732
DMS % of overall sales	3.72	4	4	.827
dynamic packaging	3.68	4	4	.779
percentage of suppliers getting bookings	4	4	4	.617
real-time availability	4.04	4	4	.653
reservation effectiveness	4	4	4	.690
reservation for non-accommodation	3.81	4	4	.664
secure transaction	3.95	4	4	.785
value of sales	3.72	4	4	.631
value of visitors	3.77	4	4	.685
volume of sales	3.90	4	4	.610
catering for target markets	4	4	4	.690
cultivate customer relationship	4	4	4	.690
customer satisfaction	4.09	4a	4	.811
identify target markets	4.04	4	4	.785
personalisation	3.77	3a	4	.751
reaching target market	4.09	4	4	.750
stakeholder satisfaction	4.09	4	4	.750
achievement of DMS aims	3.95	4	4	.722
added value	3.86	4	4	.774
barriers to entry-exit	3.54	3	3	.911
channel integration	3.90	4	4	.750
depends on DMO aims	3.90	4	4	.750
internal level of integration	3.77	3a	4	.751

Proposed Evaluation Criteria	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
no. of partners	3.54	4	4	.670
ownership of inventory	3.5	3a	3.5	.801
supplier feedback	3.72	4	4	.827
type of partners	3.59	4	4	.666
visitors to destination	3.90	4	4	.750
acquisition costs	3.68	3	4	.716
average costs of different behaviours	3.63	3	3.5	.726
balanced cost of participation	3.63	3	3.5	.726
cost per reservation	3.86	4	4	.639
internal returns	3.63	4	4	.726
transaction cost suppliers	3.72	4	4	.702
geographical spread	3.72	3	4	.767
percentage of suppliers getting visits	3.77	4	4	.685
reach percentage	3.77	4	4	.685
traffic	4.04	4	4	.653
visitor sessions	3.77	4	4	.685
volume of hits	3.54	3	3.5	.962
volume of page views	4	4	4	.755
volume of visitors – reach	3.90	4	4	.750
acquisition	3.63	3a	4	.657
abandonment	3.63	3a	4	.657
attrition	3.50	3	3	.672
conversion change percentage	3.68	3	3.5	.799
new registrations	3.95	3	4	.843
no. of logins	3.81	3	4	.795
no. of registered users	3.59	4	4	.854
offline conversion	3.59	4	4	.854
online conversion	3.95	4	4	.653
total conversion	3.90	4	4	.683
churn	3.50	3	3	.740
retention	3.77	4	4	.685
frequency	3.86	4	4	.744

Proposed Evaluation Criteria	Mean	Median	Mode	Std Deviation
loyalty	3.86	4	4	.710
volume of revisits	3.90	4	4	.750

5.5.3 Round III: Destination management system effectiveness criteria

According to the results of the Round 3 questionnaire, the criteria of the DMS website are as shows in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11 DMS Website Effectiveness Criteria

Promotion Criteria	
Impact on Destination Brand	Promotion
Click-through %	Reduce Perception Gap
SEO	
Content Criteria	
Accuracy	Freshness - up to date
Content Quality	Comprehensive Product Range
Content	Content Comprehensiveness
Multiple Language	Stickiness
Content Uniqueness	Percentage of Supplier Participation
Range of Content Providers	Intelligibility of Text
Product Comparison	Value Added Features (Customer Side)
Focus	Knowledge Creation
Slipperiness	
Design & Navigation Criteria	
Findability	Accessibility
Usability (inc Navigation)	Usefulness
Aesthetics	Usability - Suppliers Perspective
Privacy	Use of Graphics
Length of Stay	
Performance Criteria	
24-7 365 Day Operation	Speed of Response
Reliability	Integration with Suppliers Systems
Interoperability	Robustness
Regional-National Integration	Seamless
Absence of Errors	
Commerce Criteria	
Secure Transaction	Real Time Availability
Acquisition Costs	Cost per Reservation
Percentage of Suppliers getting Bookings	Dynamic Packaging
Return on Investment	Reservation Effectiveness
Value of Sales	Balanced Cost of Participation
Website Overall Sales	Value of Visitors
Volume of Sales	Reservation Existence
Reservation for non-accommodation	Transaction Cost Suppliers
Cost per Contact	Average Costs of Different Behaviours
Internal Returns	Cost of Sales

Customer-Centric Criteria	
Customer Satisfaction	Identify Target Markets
Cultivate Customer Relationship	Personalisation
Reaching Target Market	Customer Interaction
Stakeholder Satisfaction	Demand Forecasting
Cater For Target Markets	Customer Recollection
Management Criteria	
Achievement of Website Aims	Ownership of Inventory
Added Value (Supplier Side)	Depends on DMO Aims
Visitors to Destination	Barriers to Entry-Exit
Channel Integration	Type of Partners
No of Partners	Internal level of integration
Supplier Feedback	
Reach Criteria	
Visitor Sessions	Volume of Visitors - Reach
Percentage of Suppliers getting Visits	Reach Percentage
Volume of Page Views	Traffic
Geographical Spread	Volume of Hits
Acquisition Criteria	
Acquisition	Abandonment
Conversion Criteria	
Online Conversion	No of Registered Users
Conversion Change Percentage	Offline Conversion
New Registrations	Attrition
No of logins	No. of Emails Volunteered
Total Conversion	
Retention Criteria	
Retention	Churn
Loyalty Criteria	
Volume of Revisits	Frequency
Loyalty (Customer Side)	

5.6 Delphi Study Conclusion

The purpose of this Delphi study was to establish a common consensus regarding the newest updated dimensions for DMS Website, and its new updated criteria that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of a destination website. The Delphi study was the most appropriate method because it allowed investigation into an area that is reliant upon expert subject knowledge and opinion. A consensus regarding the DMS website evaluation dimensions and criteria was reached and determined through descriptive and statistics rating tools.

This study confirms that there is a rising emergence of social media as the new important component related to DMS. There are also new additions to the aims of

DMS website proposed in this study: support sustainable destination management, empower and support tourism firms, enable collaboration at the destination, increase consumer satisfaction level, and capture consumer data. There are also new additions to the dimensions of DMS website proposed in this study are: sustainability, marketing, collaboration issues, and goals of the website. The validity and reliability of this study was maintained through the careful selection of panel participants, through selecting studies and articles in addition to consistency of delivery and data collection.

The feedback from the experts showed that social media could be linked to DMS in terms of its communication/distribution to customers. If this is the case, new fields or perspectives should be taken into consideration when launching or assisting the effectiveness of a DMS. DMS can substantially contribute to sustainable goals by supporting and fostering the economic development of the destination and empowering tourism firms to exploit and use ICTs. DMS has also allow tourism firms, to improve their offline connectivity, i.e. collaboration, clustering as well as intersect oral linkages among public and private tourism and tourism-related actors. DMS provide a platform linking the DMO to the whole range of destination suppliers (e.g., hotels, restaurants) and, at the same time, actively engage with the potential tourist demand. DMS assist the visitors' experience before, during and after the visit. They provide information for tourists, and promote the destination's image at local, regional or national levels. Measuring the effectiveness of DMS with the goals and metrics identified, are necessary steps that will reveal how well destinations are attaining those goals. DMS effectiveness depends on how well a website performs with respect to the organization's objectives.

Chapter 6: **Online Survey Results-Industry Perspective**

6.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate contemporary thinking on DMS website' evaluation from both academic and destination management's perspectives. The second part of this study was to explore and review the area of DMS website evaluations from a destination management point of view. The main aim was firstly to identify industry websites evaluation approaches, in addition to key dimensions and criteria that are being adopted by them when they evaluate the effectiveness of their destination websites. In addition to other questions relevant to the evaluation. The study used structured interviews before developing a destination online survey. The results of these interviews are illustrated in the appendices.

The second section of this online survey was made up of open-ended questions. In order to analyse these questions, initial ideas of the possible responses were noted down. It was then by searching for the main categories, that potential patterns were indicated for each question. After searching for the main categories, it was decided to gather together all the data relevant to each category. Constant reviewing of the data was needed, including checking if the answers were valid in relation to the main category and re-integrating insufficient data and breaking down data into another separate category. The last stage was to define each category with an actual number of responses gathered within each one, with percentages for each one.

6.2 Industry Evaluation Approaches

This question was asked to managers and webmasters who are responsible for managing, controlling and evaluating their DMS websites. The question asked about the evaluation approaches they use to evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites. The respondents were given the option to choose from six major evaluation methods: online customer surveys, website analytics, online experiments, laboratory testing, best practice comparison, and social media analysis. They were also given the option to specify any other evaluation methods or frameworks not mentioned by these answers. The result was as follows:

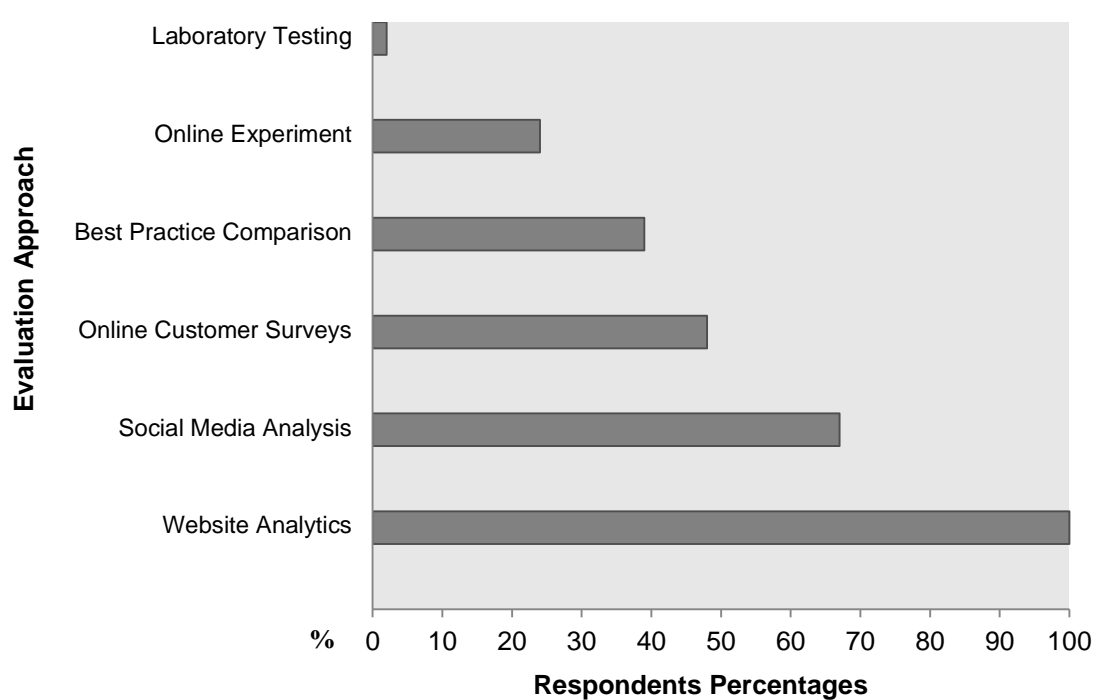


Figure 6.1 Destination Management Evaluation Approaches

It is clear from figure 6.1 that 100% of the responses (destination management) use website analytics to evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites. The social media analysis approach has been adopted by 67% from of the responses. The online customer survey evaluation approach for DMS websites was also adopted by 48% from of the participants in this study. It is also apparent that the online experiment and laboratory testing approaches are rarely used by managers in the evaluation of their DMS websites. The results also indicate that the industry do not use any other approaches mentioned in this online survey.

There are only two comments specified by two destinations about other evaluation methods they use:

- ROI comparing campaign partners conversion
- Possibility of leaving a comment

6.3 Destination Management Evaluation Criteria

This part was of the online survey asked managers what criteria they use when they evaluate the effectiveness of their website. The following table shows the descending evaluation criteria as used by destination managers, when they evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites.

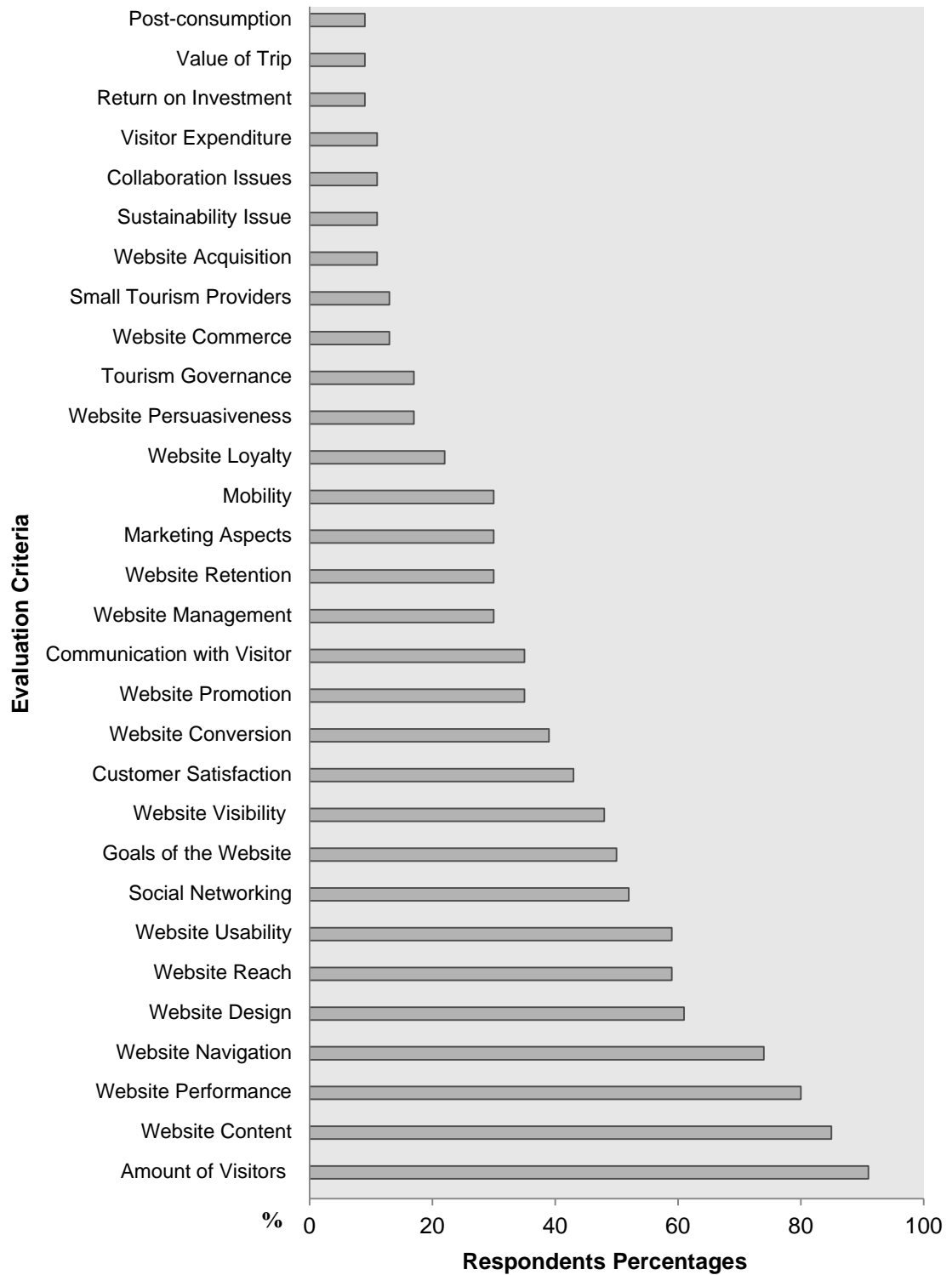


Figure 6.2 Destination Management Evaluation Criteria

It is clear from the figure 6.2 that the amount of visitors is the most important criteria for destination management when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites. 91% of the responses use these criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of

their destination websites. Responses consider the amount of visitors to their website as a crucial criterion in order to judge their website's effectiveness according to this criteria. The website content is the second most prominent criteria for the destination and 85% use it to assess their DMS websites. Website performance and website navigation, with sample percentages of 80% and 74% respectively, are also important for destinations to evaluate the effectiveness of their destination websites.

There were two comments specified by two participants about other evaluation criteria they use:

- new technologies, web trends, benchmarking with other tourism boards
- Google Page Rank SERP

6.4 Forms of Online Presence

Destination managers were also asked what forms of online presence their destination websites use. The question included 14 forms of online presence; with an instruction to choose the forms of online presence that apply to their destination websites. The respondents had the choice to choose all the forms that apply to their online presences. The forms of online presence that were presented include a designed website, designed website with different URLs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest, Four Square, Mobile Apps, YouTube, LinkedIn, email marketing, Trip Adviser, B2B Platforms, and a final option to specify any other forms not mentioned. These, as mentioned before, were extracted from the primary industry structured interviews. The statistical findings for this question are shown in descending order by occurrence, by type, of online presence in the following chart.

It can be seen from table 6.3 that 91% from the responses sample have Facebook as part of their online presence. 89% of respondents also have designed websites as part of their online presence, and the same percentages of the responses sample apply to Twitter. YouTube also has been utilised by destinations for their online presence thus 85% from the sample have YouTube. The weakest forms that have not been successfully adopted by destinations, to enhance their online presence, are: Mobile Apps, Instagram, Trip Advisor, LinkedIn, B2B Platforms, and Four Square. This is despite their importance as effective marketing and communication tool. 13% of the responses have specified other online presences, the comments of managers who specified this is shown below:

- Google + Blog
- WeChat Open data xml-feed for events and places
- We also have a blog site that is not contained within our general website.
- Vimeo, and Booking online”

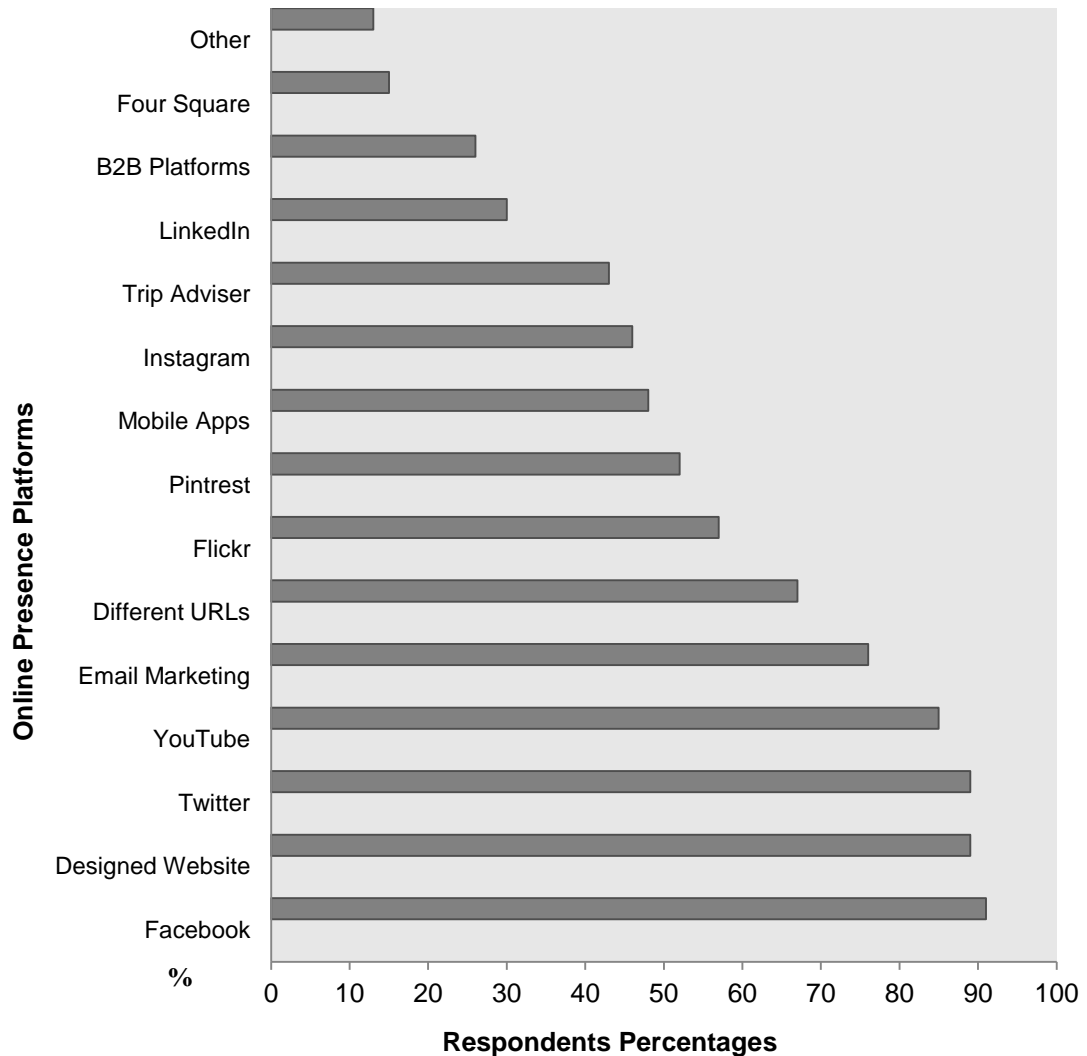


Figure 6.3 Destination Online Presence Platforms

It is known that social networking is a platform that focuses on building and reflecting of social networks or social relations among people, who have similar or somewhat similar interests, backgrounds or activities and share them simultaneously. Although social networking is possible in person, it is most popular on-line. In such cases, the websites are commonly used, known as online social networks. Generally, it is used as prevalent and growing communication tool

particularly for tourism promotion (Schonland and Williams 1996). Due to its significance, this issue raised an interest within both academia and practitioners.

6.5 Evaluation Criteria and Group or Business Areas

The aim of this question was to indicate which evaluation criteria are influenced by the business areas of the destination websites. It was curious to know who look after evaluation and which department in the organisation is most leading over the evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria given to the participants included website content, website design, website navigation, website commerce, website performance, website conversion, website reach, website management, website acquisition, website promotion, website loyalty, website retention, website visibility, website usability, website persuasiveness, amount of visitors, customer satisfaction, marketing aspects, sustainability issues, tourism governance, collaboration issues, return on investment, value of trip, visitor expenditure, goals of the website, visitor communication, small tourism providers, social networking, mobility, and post-consumption. The participants were asked to indicate each of the evaluation criteria which are influenced by the following business groups: media agency, marketing team, research department, technical team, and the senior staff. All of these criteria and the business departments were extracted from the responses in the structured interviews. The mean was calculated for each business group to discover which of the business groups dominated or had the strongest influence on the evaluation criteria.

Table 6.1 Evaluation Criteria and Business Areas

Evaluation Criteria	Media Agency	Marketing Team	Research Department	Technical Team	Senior Staff
Website Content	17%	87%	15%	24%	33%
Website Design	33%	67%	17%	48%	37%
Website Navigation	26%	70%	15%	43%	15%
Website Commerce	15%	70%	9%	22%	39%
Website Performance	22%	65%	17%	37%	15%
Website Conversion	17%	59%	15%	26%	20%
Website Reach	28%	70%	15%	30%	24%
Website Management	17%	67%	9%	33%	28%
Website Acquisition	17%	76%	13%	24%	26%
Website Promotion	30%	89%	7%	17%	26%
Website Loyalty	13%	72%	13%	11%	22%
Website Retention	11%	70%	11%	30%	15%
Website Visibility	39%	76%	7%	28%	15%
Website Usability	26%	72%	13%	43%	17%
Website Persuasiveness	13%	76%	11%	15%	28%
Amount of Visitors	15%	74%	11%	24%	17%
Customer Satisfaction	15%	76%	17%	17%	20%
Marketing Aspects	17%	87%	7%	11%	28%
Sustainability Issue	7%	57%	15%	30%	39%
Tourism Governance	4%	61%	11%	24%	48%
Collaboration Issues	13%	76%	9%	26%	35%
Return on Investment	13%	52%	15%	13%	41%
Value of Trip	2%	65%	24%	2%	28%

It can be seen from table 6.1 that marketing teams are the most influential department on the evaluation process and its related evaluation criteria. For instance, 87% of the responses identified that marketing departments are responsible for the website content. It is clear from the table that the marketing team in these destinations are responsible for and have great control over the website content, design, navigation, commerce, performance, conversion and the rest of the evaluation criteria. It is interesting to see from this figure that senior staff can influence the evaluation criteria adopted by destinations. They evaluate the effectiveness of their website, and they have more of an influence on the website evaluation criteria than the research department, which seems to have less influence on the evaluation process and its evaluation.

6.6 Factors which Influence the Evaluation Process

This part was asked to participants to learn if there are any factors that affect the method they adopt in their evaluation process of the website. The participants were given the choice to choose from five options: external Factors, implementing a

systematic approach, budgeting, return on investment, and political involvement. They were also given the choice to specify any other options or factors that affect the evaluation process of the website. The figure below shows the statistical percentages for this question.

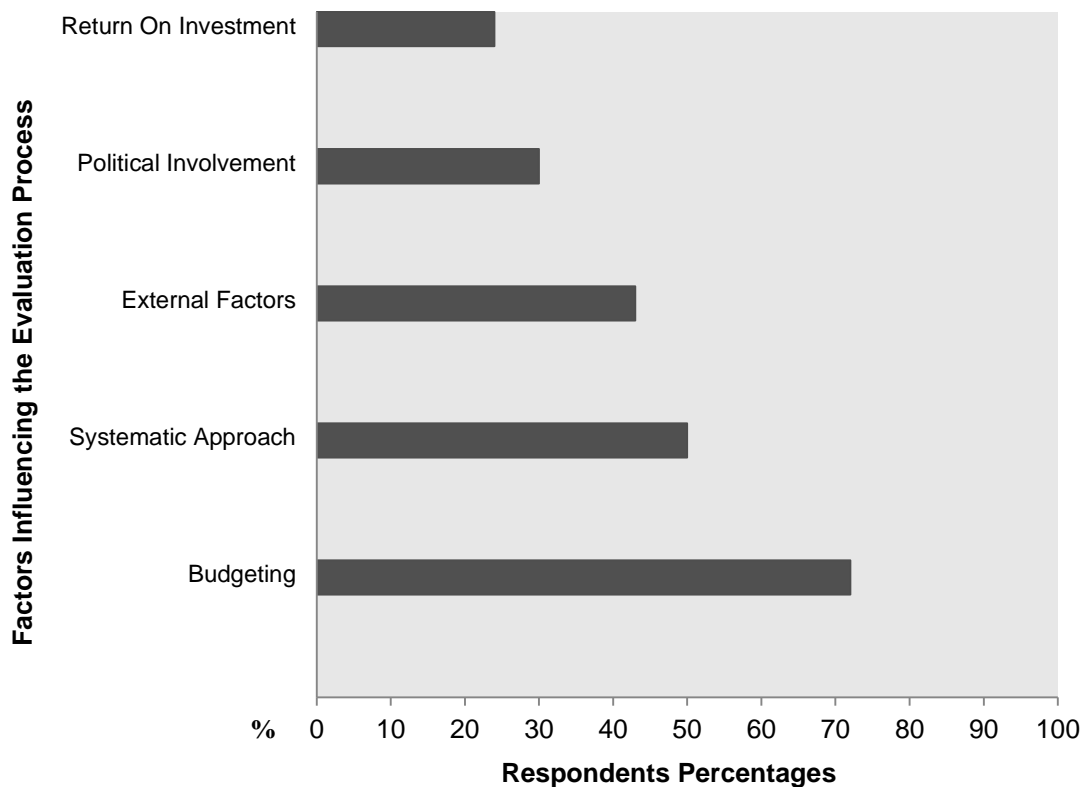


Figure 6.4 Factors Influencing the Evaluation Process

As shown in figure 6.4, budgeting is the most influential factor that affects the evaluation process, with more than 72% of respondents found that budgeting affects the evaluation process. There are also external factors that affect the evaluation process which are not related to the organization. The factors which affect the evaluation process the least are political involvement and return of investment, which don't appear to be as important and influential as budgeting and the adoption of a systematic approach.

6.7 Frequency of Management Evaluation

This question was asked to participants to find out how often they evaluate the effectiveness of their destination website. They were given choices to choose from

such as: more than 5 years, 1-4 years, every year and once a month. They were also given the option to specify other time periods. The (table 6.2) shows the participants' responses to this question. There were also other time frames specified by three of the respondents as follows: quarterly as the seasonal campaigns run; updates are always being implemented; and several people follow Google Analytics on a weekly basis.

Table 6.2 DMS Evaluation Frequencies

Frequency	%
Daily	15
Weekly	9
Monthly	57
Yearly	24
>Yearly	9

It can be seen from table 6.2 that the majority of respondents, 57%, evaluated their websites once a month. Furthermore, 15% of respondents evaluated their websites every day. It can also be seen that 24% of the respondents evaluate their destination website effectiveness every year.

6.8 Goals of Destination Websites

This question was asked to managers to enquire about the goals of their websites. The participants were asked to choose their most important goals for the destination websites from 16 options. The goals are to provide information, marketing and promotion, communication with customers, selling travel services, customer support, inspiration, providing platforms for partnerships, facilitating bookings, increase in hospitality booking, measure referrals, link with booking engines, measure customer satisfaction, reach, destination management, product development and research purposes (establishing audience needs). Respondents were asked to use a scale of 1–5 with 5 having the strongest emphasis, to investigate which of the aims is most important for the destination website. The average rate was calculated for each goal of the websites, and they are presented in descending order in the following figure:

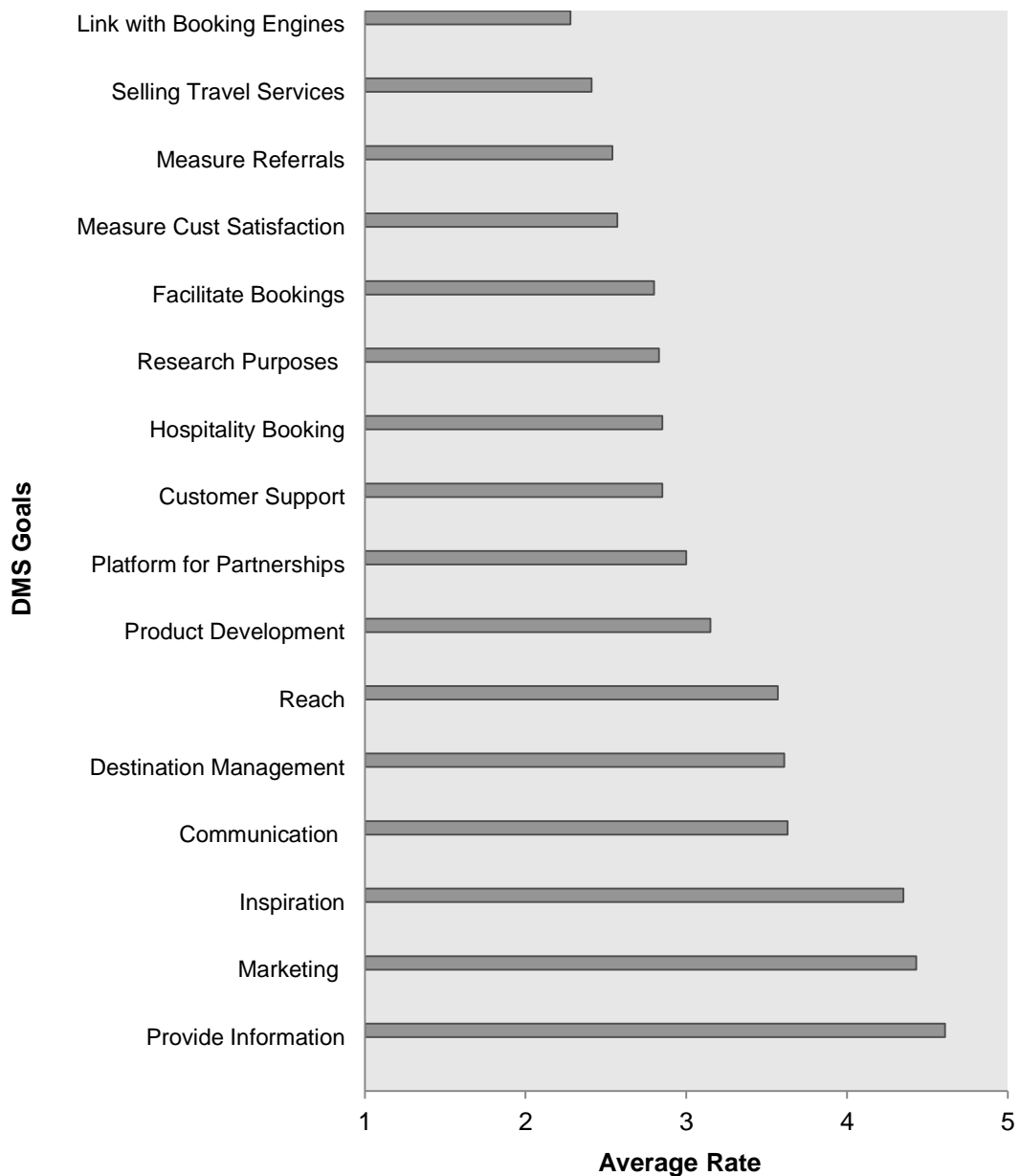


Figure 6.5 DMS Goals According to Destination Management

As seen in the figure 6.5, the most important goal for destination websites, across the 46 respondents, is to provide information to their customers. This goal had an average rate of 4.61. The second most important goal is marketing and had an average rate of 4.43. The other more important goals of destination websites were: inspiration, communication with customers, destination management, reach, and product development, with average rates of 4.35, 3.63, 3.61, 3.57 and 3.15 respectively. It can also be seen from figure 6.5 that the least important goals of the

destination websites were to measure referrals, selling travel services or link with booking engines.

6.9 Types of Markets that Destinations are Seeking to Reach

The participants were asked about the type of market that they are trying to reach, whether that is national, regional, local or international. They were asked to respond using a scale of 1-5, with 5 having the strongest emphasis. The average rates were international (4.04), national (3.89), regional (3.78) and local (3.27). It seems the destinations were trying to reach the international market first, followed by the national market. The regional and local markets are the least sought after by the sample of the 46 destinations.

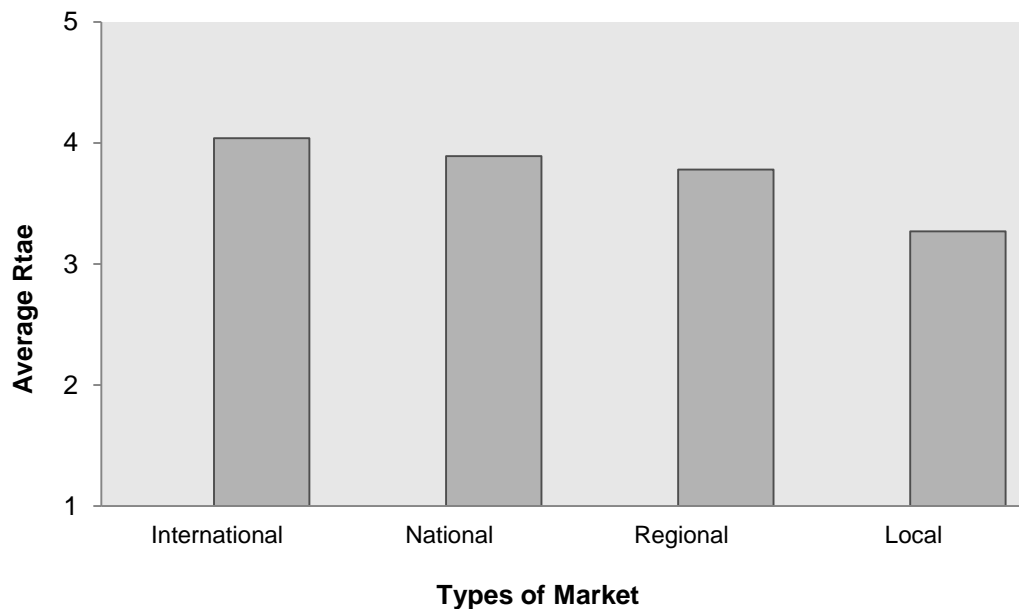


Figure 6.6 Types of Market Destination are Trying to Reach

6.10 Approaches of Learning the Good Practices of DMS

Participants were asked what approach they take to learn about the good practices of destination websites. The participants were given the choice of four approaches: meeting staff personally, calling staff directly, conference meetings, and networks. They were also given the option to specify any other approaches not mentioned. The statistical figure shows what the most used approaches are.

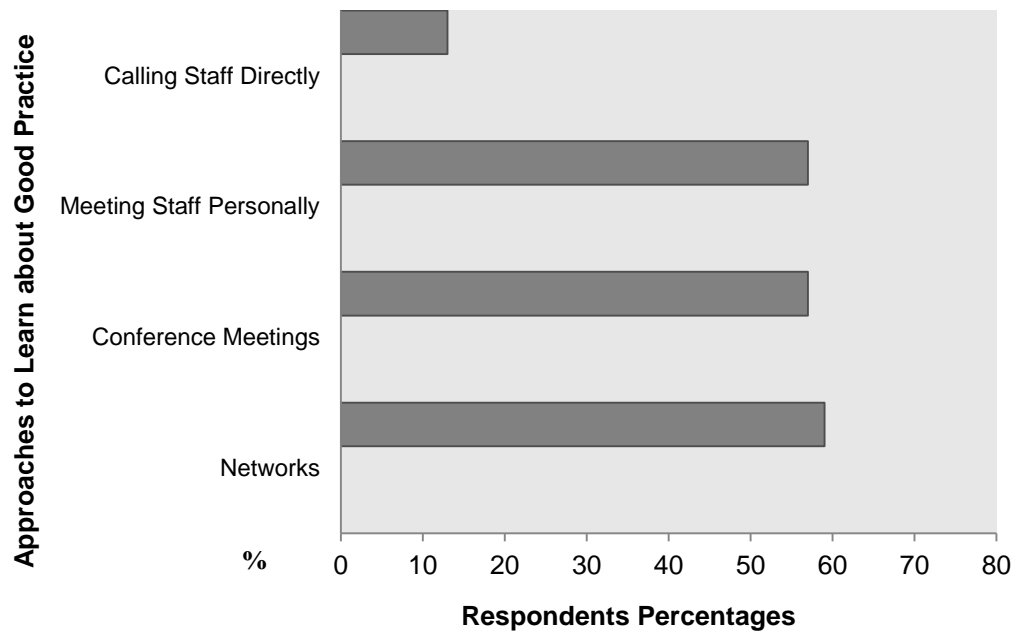


Figure 6.7 Approaches by Destinations to Learn about Good Practice

It can be seen from figure 6.7 that the majority of respondents use networks to learn about the good practices in destination websites. Meeting staff personally, alongside conference meetings, seem to be equally adopted in order to learn about the good practices of destination websites.

6.11 Destination Websites Promotion Tools

The participants were asked how they promote their destination websites. Multiple options were given to the participants to explore how they promote their destination websites, including search engine optimization, advertising, social media, cinema, mobile advertisements, transport advertisements. The respondents were asked to answer using a scale of 1-5, with 5 having the strongest emphasis. The following figure shows the most popular promotional tools for the destination websites in descending order.

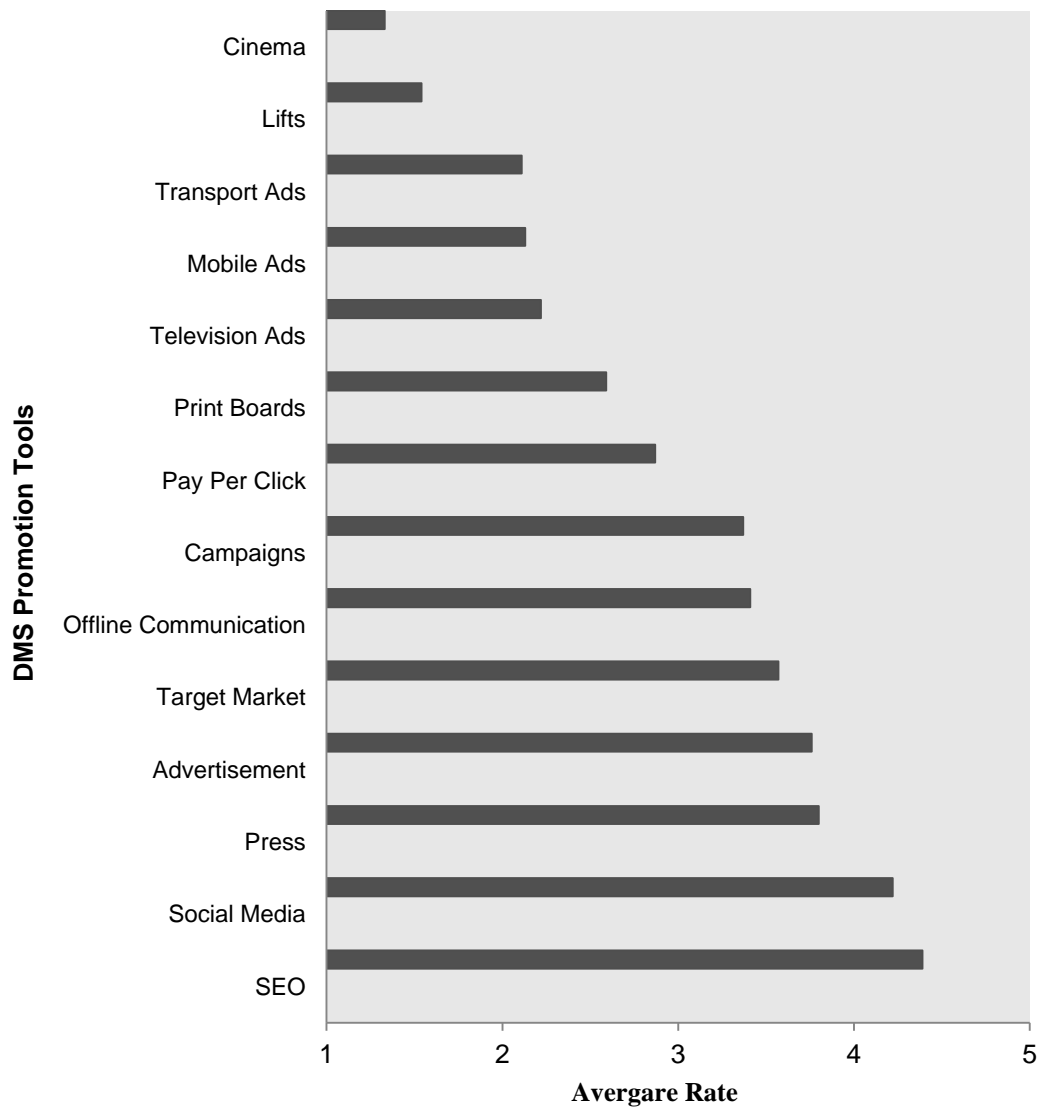


Figure 6.8 DMS Promotion Tools

It can be seen from the figure 6.8 that destination websites mainly promote their destinations websites via Search Engine optimization, with an average rate of 4.39. This was followed by social media, press and, advertising, with average rates of 4.22, 3.80 and 3.76 respectively. They do not seem to promote their destination websites via Cinema, Lifts or Transport Advertisements. It is also noticeable from the table that some destinations are promoting their websites via offline communication, national and international campaigns, and pay per click, with average rates of 3.41, 3.37, and 2.86 respectively.

6.12 Reasons for Management for Evaluating their Websites

The statistical findings for this question are shown in descending order by occurrence, in the following table.

Table 6.3 Reasons for Evaluating Destination Websites

Category	N(46)	%	Sample Comment
Customer	15	33%	"to ensure it meets visitor needs"
Marketing	7	15%	"Because it is an important media for us to interact with existing and potential clients"
Information	7	15%	"To improve the quality of information provided to visitors"
Visit	5	11%	"one goal to increases visitor spending and arrivals to Fiji"
ROI and Management	5	11%	"To report to funding organizations and to increase ROI"
Performance	3	7%	"To increase and optimise the performance"
Improve	2	4%	"because we want to update the website and need to know what's best, what path to follow"
Optimization	2	4%	"For optimization"

As seen in table 6.3, the majority of respondents (33%) evaluate their websites to examine if they meet their customers' satisfaction and needs. The second reason for destinations to evaluate their website is because they believe it is an important marketing tool for them to interact with customers. 15% of the respondents wanted to improve the quality of the information they provide to customers and 11% of respondents cared about their return on investment and would like to report and increase ROI.

6.13 Results of Evaluation

Action taken from evaluation results for this question are shown in descending order by occurrence, in the (table 6.4)

Table 6.4 Action Taken from Evaluation Results

Category	N(46)	%	Sample Comment
Attention, learn, and search for ways to improve	20	44%	"Look at ways to improve future website development"
analyse, and take action for improvement	18	39%	"Analyse with Senior staff and take Action where required"
Report	8	17%	"This is summarised and presented to the board on a monthly basis, and is later shared and discussed with the regional director every 6 months"

As seen in table 6.4, 44% of respondents look for ways to improve website development, and 17% produce reports.

6.14 Frequency of Updating the Evaluation Framework

This question was asked to managers to enquire how often they update their evaluation frameworks. The statistical findings for this question are shown in descending order by occurrence, in the following table.

Table 6.5 Update of Evaluation Process Effectiveness

Category	n	%	Sample Comment
Per Year	12	26%	"every year"
Once a month	12	26%	"once a month."
Constantly	9	20%	"We are constantly updating the evaluation process. Analytics are always changing and how people search is changing."
Quarterly	6	13%	"approximately every quarter"
Never	5	11%	"almost never"
1-4 Years	1	2%	"1 - 4 years"
Technology update	1	2%	"This is not based on time, rather on need and technology updates. If there is a new tool that can help our presence we adopt it and update our evaluation process to include it accordingly. Or, if there is an evaluation tool that can help us in evaluating more effectively, we also include it in our process. A recent addition included Real-time Analytics that allows us to monitor the behaviour of our visitors in real-time, and the result of this will be a new addition to the website to better support our visitors".

As seen from table 6.5., 26% of respondents update the effectiveness of their evaluation process every year, while 26% evaluate this process once a month. It seems that about 11% of the respondents never update the effectiveness of their evaluation process.

6.15 Role in the Organization

This question was asked to responses to enquire about their role responsibility in the organization. The statistical findings for are shown in descending order by occurrence, in (table 6.6)

Table 6.6 Role Responsibly of the Respondents

Category	N(46)	%	Sample Comment
Digital Marketing	21	46%	"I'm responsible for the marketing unit in the Egyptian tourism Authority (only me in this unit)"
Head Digital Management	12	26%	"Web Manager."
Editor webmaster and Digital Analytics	9	20%	"I am the editorial webmaster."
Tourism Assistant	4	8%	"My role is the Media and Events Assistant"

As seen from the table 6.6, the majority of respondents (46%) were responsible for the digital marketing department in the organization, or the "online marketing".

6.16 Online Survey Conclusion

The results of this online survey could be used as a guide for how industry are evaluating their DMS websites, as well as what factors influence the evaluation process, and the evaluation criteria and approaches they use in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their destination websites. It is worth searching and investigating how those in the industry are doing such evaluations. The online survey gathered precise information on the aims, of destination websites, the types of market destination websites they are trying to reach; how often they evaluate their websites; how they promote it; who actually runs such evaluations at the destination. Previous studies looked at different approaches and criteria for evaluating destination websites' effectiveness, neglecting the evaluation itself, which was undertaken by the destination management.

The results showed that the majority of respondents evaluate their DMS websites to examine if they meet their customers' satisfaction and needs. The results also showed that destination management use website analytics to evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites. The amount of visitors is the most important criteria for destination management when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites. The online survey indicated that the marketing teams are the most influential department on the evaluation process and its related evaluation criteria. The results also showed that budgeting is the most influential factor that affects the evaluation process. It was found also that the majority of respondents use networks to learn about the good practices in destination websites.

Chapter 7: Research Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings reported in chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis. The research used first three rounds of the Delphi study to identify up-to-date dimensions and criteria that experts deemed essential for inclusion in a comprehensive evaluation of destination management systems (DMS) website. The online survey included the findings collected from forty-six official destination websites, including country, city and region websites, about the actual evaluation dimensions, criteria and evaluation approaches that they currently use. The online survey also included the findings from additional investigations into industry DMS website evaluation. Chapter 5 presented the findings from the Delphi study, and chapter 6 presented the findings from the study's online industry survey. This chapter begins by discussing the findings of the Delphi study and is then followed by a discussion of the findings of the online survey. This chapter demonstrates the evaluation characteristics and similarities found while searching and investigating the DMS website evaluation conducted by the industry.

7.2 Delphi Study Discussion

The first question in the Delphi study was intended to identify the most up-to-date dimensions that the academic experts thought should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a DMS website. While this objective was relatively straightforward in theory, its importance to both academic and industry was absolutely vital. There is much published work on the dimensions of tourism website evaluation, but there is less published work on DMS websites. In this study, the Horan and Frew (2010) evaluation study conducted for destination management system website evaluation effectiveness' was adopted, for the following reasons:

1. While previous literature has proposed a number of studies to evaluate website effectiveness in the tourism domain (e.g. Buhalis 2000; Wang 2008), these evaluation studies have their limitations. They were too generic (could not be benchmarked against similar sites), they simply

concentrated on one element or dimension or they focused on a single assessment perspective.

2. The Horan and Frew (2010) study is the most recent evaluation study that addressed the previous limitations in the literature.
3. It is the most comprehensive study of its kind to have taken place in the area of effectiveness in the tourism domain.
4. It is the most comprehensive study of its kind to have taken place in the area of effectiveness in the destination management systems (DMS) domain.

7.2.1 Definition of a destination management system

In this research, a Delphi study approach, using a carefully selected panel of experts, was used first to provide and present the accurate, unbiased, updated dimensions required to evaluate the effectiveness of a destination website. Hence, the Delphi study in this thesis shows the innovativeness of the Horan and Frew (2010) work and identifies the specific dimensions pertaining to the effectiveness of DMS website evaluation. The Delphi study was used to reach a final definition of the latest up-to-date destination management system (DMS). The resulting definition was as follows.

Destination management systems are systems that consolidate and distribute a comprehensive range of tourism products through a variety of channels and platforms, generally catering to a specific region and supporting the activities of a destination management organisation (DMO) within that region. Destination management systems attempt to utilise a customer-centric approach in order to manage and market a destination as a holistic entity, typically providing strong destination-related information, real-time reservations and destination management tools and paying particular attention to supporting small and independent tourism suppliers.

This definition was widely accepted (98%) by the panel of experts and has been used as a best practice definition in a variety of research papers (Daniele and Frew 2008; Sigala 2009). However, there is a rising emergence of social media as a new important component in a DMS. The feedback from the experts showed this social media could be linked to the DMS in terms of its communication distribution to customers.

According to Alizadeh and Mat Isa (2015), social media has transformed the customers from passive receivers of company's messages to active creators that easily contribute their creations to the internet. As a result, as social media amplifies the power of users by empowering them, the authority of marketers and institutions falls. Further, it is suggested that the era of social media has shifted the level of participation and transparency, and is reshaping the ways in which communication and interaction with customers take place. Therefore, the customer-interactive nature of tourism industry lead to the expectation that tourism providers utilize the opportunities offered by social media (Alizadeh and Mat Isa 2015).

The success of a destination in terms of visitor satisfaction is a function of several interdependent components; this underscores the need for strategic and integrated planning, together with the selective use of specific tools and techniques. Using social media visitors can gather information first-hand from other visitors and make decisions about the destination or the experience. Information gathering is possible through blogging, experience sharing; story writing that can be published on personal internet site of visitors, the destination's site, or a networked site (Kiralova and Pavlicecka 2014).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) distinguish the following social media: blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Social media also include forums, ratings, reviews, social networking sites, micro-blogging sites, pod-casts and video-casts and photo sharing sites. Basic purpose of the strategy is to increase destination competitiveness.

As argued by Sigala et al. (2012), social media is challenging existing customer service, marketing and promotional processes throughout the tourism sector. Social media does provide new means for tourism organisations, including destination marketing organisations, to reengineer and implement their business models and operations through such things as the development of new services, marketing, networking and knowledge management (Sigala et al. 2012). Crofton and Parker (2012) provided preliminary measurable evidence that adopting social media as a marketing tool may have significantly contributed to tourism in Atlantic Canada by increasing local tourist numbers and consumption. Social media allows tourism practitioners to provide customised information for the individual tourist (Alizadeh and Mat Isa 2015).

Social media as a tool of tourism marketing can greatly enhance the destination's reputation and play a significant role both on the demand and on the supply side of tourism allowing destinations to interact directly with visitors via various internet platforms and monitor and react on visitors' opinions and evaluations of services. (Kiralova and Pavlicecka 2014). The integration of social media with more traditional forms of online marketing, along with cooperative promotional initiatives, contributes to an improved destination management partnership (Sigala 2012; Mauri and Minazzi 2013). Social media enhances the business websites' popularity. Cases in Italy (Milano et al. 2011) have suggested that online social networks (OSNs) like Facebook and Twitter have positive impacts on tourism website views. The websites received more visits in total. However, internationally, about half of the NTOs don't have insignificant Facebook presence. In addition NTOs do not use all the advantages that are offered by user-generated content (Hays et al. 2013).

Destinations should be able to compare their social media growth to the arrival, the overnight stays, or both numbers and look for correlation. Multivariate testing that enable destinations to compare one group of visitors exposed to social media content with another that was exposed to different or no content can be also used for measuring (Etlinger et al. 2012).

7.2.2 Aims of a destination management system

Once the definition was accepted by the panel, the focus of the Delphi study then turned to identifying a suitable set of aims for a DMS. The panel experts were asked in the second question of the first-round questionnaire to give their opinions regarding the aims of a DMS. They were given a list of aims that have been derived from the most recent research by Horan and Frew (2010) and were asked for opinions regarding these aims and whether there were any new updated aims for destination management systems that they saw as important enough to add to the list. The aims identified and agreed upon by the panel were as follows:

- To effectively co-ordinate the marketing activities and branding of a specific destination and the comprehensive range of products it has to offer; Format
- To provide timely, accurate, unbiased, quality assured destination- and product-based information (both accommodation and non-accommodation);

- To facilitate the effective distribution and sale of a comprehensive range of tourism products from a destination;
- To present the destination as a holistic entity displaying a destination orientation rather than a product orientation;
- To provide appropriate and sustainable relationship building mechanisms with customers through effective, meaningful and continuous communication;
- To increase the satisfaction level of their suppliers, the local community and all their stakeholders (to build and maintain a meaningful relationship with stakeholders);
- To facilitate the management of a destination by supporting DMO activities and providing tools, support and training for stakeholders.

The new, additional aims identified and agreed upon by the panel are as follows:

Table 7.1 New Suggested DMS Evaluation Aims

New Suggested DMS Evaluation Aims	
Support sustainable destination management	Empower and support tourism firms
Enable collaboration at the destination	Increase consumer satisfaction level
Capture consumer data	

A destination management system (DMS) could be perceived as more than an online booking system or web system due to its wide range of service capabilities, including destination promotion, tourism management, and business development and visitor database as its foundation. Therefore, a DMS increases a website's visibility to the external world. Many small and medium size tourist enterprises (SMTEs) have their own websites but have failed to highlight their online presence due to limited resources (Buhalis and Law 2008). A DMS acts like an interface between tourism enterprises and the external world, through support modules such as e-commerce system, product management system, consumer CRM, business CRM and membership, and management reporting. These DMS aims that are identified in this research comprise the most recent set, which is comprehensive and far reaching in nature. The aims cover a variety of DMS activities, including

distribution, marketing, content, destination orientation, customers, stakeholders and management.

7.2.3 Destination management system effectiveness dimensions

In this research, a Delphi approach with a carefully selected panel of experts was used first to provide and present accurate, unbiased and updated dimensions that are required to evaluate the effectiveness of a DMS website. After much discussion and following an eight-month Delphi study, the panel agreed on a total of 16 up-to-date, evaluation dimensions. These dimensions are presented in Tables 7.2 and 7.3.

Table 7.2 DMS Effectiveness Dimensions

DMS Evaluation Dimensions (Horan and Frew 2010)	
Content	Reach
Design & Navigation	Management
Customer	Acquisition
Commerce	Promotion
Performance	Loyalty
Conversion	Retention

Table 7.3 New Suggested Evaluation Dimensions

New Suggested Dimensions	
Sustainability	Collaboration issues
Marketing	Goals of the website

The new additions to the dimensions of the DMS website proposed in this study are sustainability, marketing, collaboration issues and goals of the website. These dimensions form the basis for a single, destination website evaluation (Table 7.3).

The dimensions identified in this research are the most recent dimensions to be included in a comprehensive destination management system (DMS) website evaluation. Identifying these dimensions is crucial because the first stage of a comprehensive evaluation of tourism websites should be to determine which dimensions influence website effectiveness (Law and Cheung 2005Car). Furthermore, identifying these dimensions will influence the approach taken or the methodology employed to assess the effectiveness of the destination website (Mich et al. 2005). Before deciding which method or approach to use to measure the

effectiveness of destination websites, it is essential to have dimensions in place to establish a comprehensive evaluation framework. A comprehensive methodology for evaluating DMS websites with a focus on effectiveness would greatly benefit from the dimensions identified in this research. The next section thoroughly explains the identified dimensions.

Content

The majority of previous studies in the area of tourism website effectiveness have concentrated on inspecting the content of the tourism websites to determine the presence of certain features and services. Cano and Prentice (1998) and Gretzel et al. (2000) believed that the content of DMS websites is particularly important because it directly influences the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience for the consumer. The content dimension in previous studies was assessed from customer feedback or by the researchers. Previous studies in tourism website effectiveness indicated that there is relationship between the dimensions being evaluated and providing good quality content and services on a website (Park et al. 2007). Good quality content websites encourage customer satisfaction, which will lead to the advancement of other website dimensions, such as reach, acquisition, conversion, retention and loyalty (Sigala and Sakellariadis 2004). The findings of this Delphi study, which indicate that content dimensions are critical in a comprehensive evaluation framework for DMS websites.

Design and Navigation

The design and navigation dimension refers to the way in which the content is provided within a website. Previous studies on assessing the effectiveness of tourism websites have also indicated that, like the content dimension, the design and navigation dimension has a significant part to play in the advancement of other website dimensions, such as acquisition, retention and conversion of visitors to a website (Ranganathan and Ganapathy 2002). Researchers have shown that well-designed websites support customers in their decision making at every stage of their involvement on the website (Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011) by providing them with signs and services they need while navigating the website. Previous studies have also shown that the design and navigation dimension has enormous implications for the stickiness of the website and for customer loyalty and conversion (Kothari and Fesenmaier 2007). Research has showed that the design and navigation dimension is a critical factor for an effective evaluation of destination websites (Douglas and

Mills 2004; Kaplanidou and Vogt 2006; Park and Gretzel 2007; Gretzel et al. 2012; Bastida and Huan 2014).

Customer

Like the content, design and navigation, the customer dimension was also thought to be an important dimension when evaluating the effectiveness of destination websites. Previous studies have indicated that website visitors provide a wealth of information that can be used in website management to better understand the customers and ultimately understanding the target market (Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011; Johnson et al. 2012). Customers' characteristics and behaviours on the websites offer important signs about website presence and performance. Website management is now responsible for learning about customers' behaviour, wants, needs and expectations (Maswera et al. 2005). Research has shown that understanding customers is a vital component of achieving website effectiveness (Teichmann and Zins 2008; Beldona and Cai 2002; Han and Mills 2006; Kah et al. 2010; Romanazzi et al. 2011; Bastida and Huan 2014).

Commerce

The Delphi approach in this research has also identified commerce as an important dimension pertaining to the effectiveness of the destination website evaluation. Previous research in tourism website evaluation showed as well that revenue and profit were important indicators of a website's success (Park et al. 2007). Researchers argued about the many benefits for both customers and stakeholders that should be assessed (Welling and White 2006). The value and volume of sales, cost of sales and return on investment are within the commerce criteria that should be evaluated to indicate a website's success (Park and Gretzel 2007). However, fewer studies in the area of destination websites have focused on the commerce dimension when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites (Douglas and Mill 2004; Wang 2008; Li and Wang 2010; Albadvi and Saddam 2012).

Performance

DMS websites performance is also an important dimension affecting the effectiveness of destination website evaluation. The reliability, speed of response, robustness and responsiveness of a website are an important indication of website performance success (Mich et al. 2003a). Research has shown that performance is extremely important when evaluating the overall effectiveness of a tourism website

(Douglas et al. 2003; Hu 2009). The website's performance is best measured by the specific goals that have been established by the DMO. The result of this Delphi study about the performance dimension is also aligned with the research on destination website evaluation, which shows that the performance of destination websites is critical for an effective evaluation (Han and Mills 2006; Cheung et al. 2009; Burgess et al. 2011; Cho and Sung 2012).

Conversion

Furthermore, the results of this Delphi study revealed that conversion is an important part of DMS website evaluation effectiveness. Researchers argued that a good conversion rate is a fair indication of a website's ability to persuade visitors to complete a particular action on a website (Morrison et al. 2004). They claimed that one of the basic metrics that must be assessed when analysing customer's behaviour on websites is the conversion rates of customers (Teichmann and Zins 2008). Previous studies indicate that if a website is to achieve its goals, customers should achieve their goals as well. If the customer's goals have been achieved, then those customers will be encouraged to return to the website. Therefore, this will positively affect customer loyalty (Tarasofsky 2003; Eisenberg 2004). This finding of the Delphi study is mirrored in the limited research about destination website evaluation (Field et al. 2004; Kim 2005).

Management

The Delphi panel members have suggested management as an important dimension in a comprehensive evaluation framework for DMS websites. The few studies that addressed the evaluation of DMS websites highlighted this issue, such as Sigala (2009), who found that both management's and employees' technological expertise influenced the effectiveness of the DMS websites. This dimension has been less investigated in this area of study; thus, further research is required.

Loyalty

Like the other identified dimensions in the Delphi study results, loyalty was found to be another important dimension that should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a destination website. Loyalty helps customers achieve their aims, and it helps to improve the relationships that a tourism operation forges with its customers (Tarasofsky 2003). Despite the significance of this dimension and the Delphi study findings, which suggested that loyalty is an important dimension that

should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of a destination website, little previous research has explored and assessed the loyalty dimension in DMS website evaluation.

Acquisition

Customer acquisition is an expensive undertaking and for many businesses is the most expensive part of the sales cycle (Ryan 2001a). The emphasis of a good website strategy should be placed firmly on retaining and converting existing visitors and customers (Ranganathan and Ganapathy 2002). Research has shown that much of this drop-off in acquisition is attributable to unsuitable navigation cues, inadequate content, poor performance and a failure to encourage repeat customers (Phippen et al. 2004). Therefore, further investigation should be conducted by the industry to include this dimension when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites.

Promotion

Promotion is also a vital dimension that should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of destination websites. It is now a critical activity and a dynamic factor for achieving destination website evaluation effectiveness (Park and Gretzel 2007). Previous research indicates that gaining an understanding of how visitors arrive at websites is crucial. These findings of this Delphi study address promotion as an important dimension to be included when developing a comprehensive evaluation framework for destination websites. This is aligned with the few studies that have also addressed this dimension (Beldona and CAI 2002; Burgess et al. 2011).

Retention

Similarly, the premise surrounding retention is that it is far less costly to sell additional products or services to an existing customer than it is to generate a new customer (Sterne 2014). This has a huge impact on conversion, loyalty, and commerce and lifetime value. Accordingly, this dimension warrants further investigation by the industry when evaluating website effectiveness. The findings of the Delphi study also show that retention is an important dimension that should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of destination websites. This dimension is about encouraging a customer to repeat a purchase (Douglas and Mills 2004). It has a huge impact on conversion, loyalty, commerce and lifetime value (Cutler and

Sterne 2014). Despite of this significant dimension, no previous research explored or assessed the retention dimension in destination website evaluation literature.

The literature review reveals the importance of destination marketing, promotion and communication in addition to technology or economics for DMS success. Many researchers have shown the effectiveness of advertising and promotion and the importance of effective marketing. For example Gretzel et al. (2000) identified the effective medium for tourism advertisement to be the Internet. Communication and collaboration factors are also important. Palmer and Bejou (1995) emphasised the need for stakeholder collaboration. Donnelly and Vaske (1997) examined factors in tourism promotion, and Selin and Myers (1998) studied stakeholder satisfaction within a regional tourism marketing group. They found that effective communication was critical to achieving satisfaction, and they emphasised a strong leadership in the DMO to gain high stakeholder involvement. Pearce (1992) stated that different stakeholder groups evaluate the success of a DMO. He concluded that a successful DMO clearly defines its objectives, has adequate resources and a well-developed understanding of its purpose and should visibly address this with stakeholders.

Previous studies attempted to assess a subset of a website's activities. However, a website simply cannot be analysed effectively by using a narrow scope. A website's success is affected by many factors (Zafiroopoulos and Vrana 2006); therefore, a thorough analysis of website effectiveness can only be completed by using different dimensions. Complex problems are generally multidimensional in nature, and website effectiveness is a complex fusion of many elements and dimensions. Therefore, no single element or dimension can completely determine website effectiveness; a multidimensional approach is required for a comprehensive evaluation. For instance, a website's usability might be poor, but its content might be exceptionally good. Tourism websites require several specific components to work in tandem in order to achieve success. It is crucial that all these components be included in any evaluation of these websites (Law and Cheung 2005). While many of the previous studies that evaluated website effectiveness promoted a multidimensional approach, the number and choice of dimensions used differed significantly across these studies (Szymanski and Hise 2000). However, most researchers agreed on the usefulness of a specific set of dimensions to evaluate tourism websites (O'Connor and Frew 2004). The components (dimensions) of this framework have been confirmed and updated in this thesis.

After identifying these dimensions, the next section of the Delphi was to identify the most recent and up-to-date criteria for DMS websites.

7.2.4 Destination management system effectiveness criteria

The studies about DMS website evaluation that boast a high number of criteria included a maximum of 47 criteria of evaluation (Li and Wang 2010), followed by studies using 32 criteria (Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011) and another using 23 criteria (Bastida and Huan 2014). Evidently, in current literature, there was an urgent need to identify what actually constitutes criteria that must be included in comprehensive DMS website frameworks. Some dimensions were composed of as little as two criteria (acquisition and retention) while other dimensions needed as many as 14 separate criteria (content), according to experts.

The criteria given to the panel were grouped by dimensions, and they were agreed upon by 98 per cent of panel members (Table 7.5). Not all of the criteria listed in Table 7.5 were stated in the previous DMS website evaluation literature. Few of the DMS website evaluation criteria listed (reservation effectiveness, multiple language, return on investment, product comparison, content, cultivate customer relationship, language, use of graphics, usability, accessibility, personalisation, value added features, findability, usefulness, aesthetics, privacy, length of stay, comprehensive product range, and knowledge creation) were among criteria that existed in previous destination website evaluation studies (Wang 2008; Kim and Fesenmaier 2008; Cheung et al. 2009; Albadvi and Saddam 2012). However, acquisitions, abandonment, attrition, retention, churn, offline conversion, number of emails volunteered, volume of revisits and frequency, were criteria totally ignored by previous studies.

The results of the Delphi study in terms of the criteria in Table 7.5 are currently the most recent and up-to-date criteria to be included in a comprehensive destination website evaluation. The findings are significant because there is a lack of comprehensive and updated criteria that should be included in an evaluation of a DMS website. A comprehensive methodology or framework for the evaluation of DMS website effectiveness would greatly benefit from this list of updated criteria. The set of up-to-date criteria are comprehensive and far reaching in nature. The criteria are also quite diverse; while not all destinations may attempt to realise all these criteria, they are still vital for their website evaluation. Furthermore, it is

extremely useful from a number of different perspectives to have such a comprehensive set of updated criteria at the company's disposal.

Table 7.4 DMS Effectiveness Criteria

Promotion Criteria	
Impact on Destination Brand	Promotion
Click-through %	Reduce Perception Gap
SEO	
Content Criteria	
Accuracy	Freshness - up to date
Content Quality	Comprehensive Product Range
Content	Content Comprehensiveness
Multiple Language	Stickiness
Content Uniqueness	Percentage of Supplier Participation
Range of Content Providers	Intelligibility of Text
Product Comparison	Value Added Features (Customer Side)
Focus	Knowledge Creation
Slipperiness	
Design & Navigation Criteria	
Findability	Accessibility
Usability (inc Navigation)	Usefulness
Aesthetics	Usability - Suppliers Perspective
Privacy	Use of Graphics
Length of Stay	
Performance Criteria	
24-7 365 Day Operation	Speed of Response
Reliability	Integration with Suppliers Systems
Interoperability	Robustness
Regional-National Integration	Seamless
Absence of Errors	
Commerce Criteria	
Secure Transaction	Real Time Availability
Acquisition Costs	Cost per Reservation
Percentage of Suppliers getting Bookings	Dynamic Packaging
Return on Investment	Reservation Effectiveness
Value of Sales	Balanced Cost of Participation
Website Overall Sales	Value of Visitors
Volume of Sales	Reservation Existence
Reservation for non-accommodation	Transaction Cost Suppliers
Cost per Contact	Average Costs of Different Behaviours
Internal Returns	Cost of Sales
Customer-Centric Criteria	
Customer Satisfaction	Identify Target Markets
Cultivate Customer Relationship	Personalisation
Reaching Target Market	Customer Interaction
Stakeholder Satisfaction	Demand Forecasting
Cater For Target Markets	Customer Recollection

Management Criteria	
Achievement of Website Aims	Ownership of Inventory
Added Value (Supplier Side)	Depends on DMO Aims
Visitors to Destination	Barriers to Entry-Exit
Channel Integration	Type of Partners
No of Partners	Internal level of integration
Supplier Feedback	
Reach Criteria	
Visitor Sessions	Volume of Visitors - Reach
Percentage of Suppliers getting Visits	Reach Percentage
Volume of Page Views	Traffic
Geographical Spread	Volume of Hits
Acquisition Criteria	
Acquisition	Abandonment
Conversion Criteria	
Online Conversion	No of Registered Users
Conversion Change Percentage	Offline Conversion
New Registrations	Attrition
No of logins	No. of Emails Volunteered
Total Conversion	
Retention Criteria	
Retention	Churn
Loyalty Criteria	
Volume of Revisits	Frequency
Loyalty (Customer Side)	

7.3 Online Survey Discussion

While there is always an urge to converge, evident in terms such as ‘best practice’ and ‘benchmarking’, there is also continual evolution in exploring practices within particular communities. Therefore, in this thesis, practice was regarded as what was incorporated into daily practice, which constitutes action regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of DMS websites. Practice in this thesis also has been investigated through the tacit knowledge and practical consciousness of the destination management regarding the website evaluation approaches. In the literature, less time and effort has been spent on emphasising how people in the industry are doing things (Rohm 2002). Therefore, this study highlighted and reviewed the evaluation dimensions that are currently being adopted by the industry. It has investigated and explored what and how DMS website evaluation been carried out in the industry in reality. Reality is the state of things as they actually exist, rather than as they may appear or might be imagined. It reflects authenticity and includes actual evaluation that already exists in the industry. The actual evaluation adopted in the industry is contrasted with what is imaginary, what is false, what is fictional or what is abstract.

What is abstract plays a role in academic research. No single study in tourism research literature has been conducted to explore DMS website evaluation in the tourism industry. Therefore, this part of the research calls attention to the practical evaluation dimensions, criteria and evaluation approaches adopted by destinations for their websites. The interview-based online surveys were conducted to mirror and review the industry evaluation. They simply asked industry members which evaluation approaches, dimensions, criteria and other relevant questions they use in order to evaluate their destination websites. From these results, this thesis has identified the evaluation characteristics already existed in industry, and it highlighted some of the similarities within the theory in DMS website evaluation.

7.3.1 Criteria

The online survey indicated that criteria used by the industry were not very comprehensive and broad in nature. The criteria that are currently being used by the industry are not diverse. Diversity is vital for effective DMS website evaluation. The online survey indicated that the industry only focused on 15 criteria for its website evaluation: promotion, impact on destination brand, range of content providers, usability, design, 24-7/365 day operation, regional-national integration, return on investment, value of sales, value of visitors, customer satisfaction, destination websites aims, volume of visitors and loyalty (Figure. 6.3).

The criteria suggested by the academic panels of experts are more far reaching in nature. However, not all these criteria are being adopted or even recognised by the industry. The findings of this online survey indicate that 91 evaluation criteria for destination website evaluation were totally abandoned by the industry. These criteria included accuracy, freshness, content quality, comprehensive product range, content comprehensiveness, multiple language, stickiness, content uniqueness, percentage of supplier participation, intelligibility of text, product comparison, value added features, focus, knowledge creation and slipperiness. Also criteria from the design and navigation dimension, such as findability, accessibility, usefulness, aesthetics, privacy, use of graphics and length of stay. Furthermore, speed of response, reliability, integration with suppliers systems, interoperability, robustness, seamless, absence of errors, and the criteria of acquisition, retention and conversion were totally ignored by the industry. These criteria were deemed important for assessing the effectiveness of a DMS website's effectiveness. In addition, most of these abandoned criteria were included in the previous evaluations of DMS website

effectiveness. For example, content uniqueness, multiple languages, intelligibility of text and value added features are important criteria that were considered by previous literature.

The results here are significant because they demonstrate that there is a significant gap in the industry in terms of the evaluation criteria suggested by the panels in the Delphi study. There is no parallel between the criteria identified in the Delphi study and those found and used by industry practitioners. The findings from the Delphi study conclude that inclusion of these criteria in an effective and comprehensive destination website evaluation framework is vital.

7.3.2 Perspectives

From analysing the results of the online survey, it was found that the industry in its DMS website effectiveness evaluation depends only on one evaluation perspective. Certain pieces of research were criticised for failing to include the perspectives of all the relevant stakeholders. No single assessment approach is perfect, and the application of any one of these approaches in isolation could prove somewhat misleading. A multi-dimensional approach is required for comprehensive and effective evaluation to occur. Therefore, the inclusion of a variety of stakeholder viewpoints is an important part of assessing the effectiveness of any system (Louillet 2007).

By using an array of different techniques and perspectives, it presents the tourism providers with a more complete picture of how their website is performing (Schegg et al. 2005). For instance, even if the structure and layout of DMS websites are optimised to achieve the aims of the business to their fullest potential, the customer perspective must still be taken into consideration (Leung and Law 2008). Therefore, in order to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of a tourism website, it is important to take a multi-perspective approach, incorporating inputs from relevant stakeholders.

The online survey results revealed that the industry is mainly implementing a website analytics approach when evaluating destination websites. The results also revealed that the industry is implementing a customer survey approach in addition to the social media approach and best practice comparison approach. These results indicate that there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation approaches currently been

used in the industry. The results also indicate that the industry is adopting too few evaluation perspectives when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites.

The websites analytics approach, which the industry is mainly adopted, may be attractive because the information is collected automatically and with little effort. The industry is working in an unpredictable environment, and this approach would provide it with an informed viewpoint, unlike approaches based on trial and error (Michopoulou and Buhalis 2004; Law et al. 2010). However, in adopting this approach, the industry is measuring only the macro events of DMS websites. Therefore, the analytics approach will never provide the industry with information that drives strategic business decision making. The approach could provide businesses with information that drives their strategic business only if there are intelligent website strategy decisions within the destination. Hence, to enable the extraction of this information effectively, there should be consistency between the strategy of the destination website and the information collected from this website's analytical tools.

The majority of previous studies did not use the website analytics approach to evaluate tourism and DMS websites. There is a general lack of consensus and understanding when it comes to standards, measurements and definitions of websites analytics (Morrison et al. 1999; Li and Wang 2010; Giannopoulos and Mavragani 2011). Moreover, there is a lack of focus on understanding and adjusting the events that lead to the results shown by the website analytics evaluation approach.

The results of the industry online survey revealed that the industry is using the customer survey approach in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their destination websites. Although this approach is essential to define the success of a website (Zafiropoulos and Vrana 2006; Parasuraman et al. 2005), it is obtrusive by nature (Chung and Law 2003). The industry in this case is adopting a domain-specific approach that ignores other important dimensions from other perspectives. Adopting a narrow view for understanding website effectiveness can negatively influence the possibility of capturing both internal and external influences of effectiveness. It is important not only to focus on one tourism domain for a comprehensive effectiveness evaluation framework for destination websites, but on a variety of stakeholder viewpoints (Park and Gretzel 2007).

The results also revealed that the social media approach is currently being used by the industry in order to evaluate the effectiveness of its destination websites. The results show that destinations provide advanced social network communication functions. It is obvious that these destinations intend to improve their online presence. This social networks range from traditional television programs and newspapers to more modern media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The results indicated that all the DMS websites had attempted to implement these features to adapt to the new tourism environment. However, few studies have focused on the social media approach to evaluate the effectiveness of DMS websites. Similarly, the best practice comparison approach was not used, and there was also a lack of benchmarking approach studies in the literature on destination website evaluation.

7.3.3 Approach

The result of the online surveys is significant because they confirmed that there is no consistency or parallel between the academic experts and industry practitioners in terms of the evaluation approaches used. The destination in their evaluation websites depend on one perspective of evaluation and neglecting a variety of other evaluation approaches that existed in the previous literature, including the most comprehensive ones. The industry focuses only on one perspective of an evaluation approach. However, an effectiveness and comprehensive a DMS website evaluation approach cannot be effectively examined by taking into consideration only one perspective (Horan 2010). There are many perspectives that must be considered when evaluating a website. Therefore, the triangulation of data gathered from a number of different sources, methods and perspectives is an extremely useful practice to eliminate some of the limitations of using one approach in isolation.

Furthermore, weightings are crucial to the overall balance of any evaluation framework (Park et al. 2007). All dimensions and criteria should not be weighted equally because they are not of equal importance (Lu et al. 2002). However, the results of the interviews and online survey indicate the lack of a weighting perspective within the evaluation approaches used by the industry. Finally, the results show that the industry for the most part has not acknowledged the potential of benchmarking. Benchmarking provides operators with a good overview of their strengths and weaknesses, thus helping them identify what aspects require attention.

The success of any website requires continuous innovation, management and maintenance (Albert et al. 2004). The need to continually assess website presence has been well documented in the tourism literature (Leung and Law 2008). The results of industry survey indicate that unlike most studies in the area of website effectiveness, the industry conducts more one-off assessments. The one-off assessments provide a snapshot of a website's effectiveness. The results show that the DMS website evaluation is constantly evolving. The evaluation is conducted as a corrective procedure over time. However, continuous evaluation of a static website is an ineffective use of time and resources, and while the benefits of longitudinal studies are apparent, they are time consuming and require commitment and resources. Nevertheless, evaluation frameworks in which goals, guidelines and benchmarks can be set and sought after need to be iterative and conducted on a continuous basis. Only then can these frameworks be used to inform business decision making and drive continuous improvements (Fuchs and Hopken 2005).

7.3.4 Dimensions

The online survey results indicate that the industry in its DMS website evaluation focused on similar dimensions that panel experts in the Delphi study suggested are crucial and must be included in a comprehensive tourism destination website. Dimensions of content, navigation and design, performance, promotion, commerce, management, reach and customer orientated aspects of destination websites are all dimensions that are currently being adopted by destinations in order to evaluate their websites. These dimensions have been taken into consideration by the industry when evaluating DMS websites. This reflects the fact that most of the dimensions that have been suggested by panel experts in the Delphi study as being crucial and must be included in a comprehensive tourism destination websites are currently being adopted by the industry when it evaluates destination websites. Consequently, most of the findings of the Delphi study are in parallel with those in the online survey. Hence, the findings of the online survey provides empirical evidence that there is congruence and consensus between academic experts and the industry in terms of the most important evaluation dimensions for destination website evaluation. However, the dimensions of acquisition, conversion and retention were totally ignored by the industry. These dimensions have been suggested by panel experts in the Delphi study as crucial and must be included in a comprehensive tourism destination websites.

The results of the online survey about the dimensions identified are significant because they show that there is congruence and consensus between academic experts and the industry in terms of the dimensions that are crucial for tourism destination website evaluation. The parallel is in terms of content, navigation and design, performance, promotion, commerce, management and customer evaluation dimensions. On other hand, there is no parallel between the finding from the Delphi study and the findings from industry practitioners in terms of the acquisition, conversion and retention dimensions. These three dimensions were totally ignored by industry. The Delphi study concludes that an effective destination website evaluation should be examined by taking all the identified evaluation dimensions into consideration.

7.3.5 Others factors

Although the tourism industry is divided and organised in an ad hoc fashion (Franklin and Crang 2001; Franklin 2003), the results of the online survey indicated that most destinations adopt similar criteria, dimensions, evaluation approaches and perspectives when they evaluate the effectiveness of their DMS websites. They also have similar purposes for their websites such as their destination websites are mainly for information provision purposes with less focus placed on the communication, transaction and assurance applications. Furthermore, the marketing team in all these destinations have an influence on the selection of the destination websites' evaluation criteria. The financial resource variable makes the most significant contribution to the destinations when they evaluate their websites. Additionally, and most importantly, the results indicated that all these destinations find that implementing a systematic approach influences the evaluation process. Finally, the results confirmed that the majority of destinations use only networks to learn about good practice for their destination website evaluation.

Evaluating destination websites is a learning process, and the reasons behind a website's effectiveness or ineffectiveness need to be understood by the destinations (Patton 2002), so they can improve the effectiveness of their websites (Patton 2002). However, no previous research has investigated how the industry is evaluating their websites, when the evaluation of their destination websites is undertaken, what causes them to be unable to effectively evaluate their websites etc. This information is vital, because it is all relevant to the evaluation and may

shed light on ways to improve and enhance the effectiveness of destination websites in the industry.

Researchers have had their own interpretations of effectiveness evaluation. They have argued that the area of tourism website evaluation is complex and that this complexity can be related to the subjective nature of the idea of effectiveness. Therefore, various effectiveness factors and measures were described in the related literature. Even so, some evaluation criteria have been mentioned by the industry, which were totally neglected by previous research, such as sustainability, collaboration issues and visitor expenditure.

7.4 Critical Reflection between Theory and Practice

The goal of this section is to critically reflect on the research results found from both academic and industry perspectives. Critical thinking and reflection can bridge the gap between theory and practice, improve the quality of DMS website evaluation and stimulate professional development. It has been suggested that reflecting on professional experiences, rather than learning from formal theories, may be the most important source of personal professional development and improvement (Freshwater and Rolfe 2001). Therefore, the aim of this critical reflection is not to produce knowledge that can be justified in terms of 'correspondence' to 'reality', but instead to propose a pragmatic, coherent view of knowledge that emphasises the centrality of dialogue with theory and practice related to DMS website evaluation. Theory and practice are inextricably linked and the combined processes of reductive, inductive and hypothetico-deductive logic must be used in a transparent manner in order to establish the credibility of interpreting DMS websites' evaluation findings (Freshwater and Rolfe 2001). Although there is no clear demarcation between what is found and what is constructed, a commitment to coherence serves as the basis of a pragmatic theory of knowledge, which is what this section attempts to present.

The processes of analysis and interpretation regarding reflection between the theory (academic perspective) and practice (destination management perspective) of DMS website evaluation have not been documented by academic literature. Therefore, before conducting such a critical reflection, a typical formulation about the current themes, issues and findings of DMS website evaluation data from both academic and industry perspectives was applied in this section concerning critical reflection.

However, it was felt that doing so would mean using passive metaphors, because it implies that findings are somehow already contained in the evidence collected and therefore, the processes of interpretation would reveal what was already in the data. Therefore, an alternative strategy for conducting such reflection between was needed.

Returning to the aims and objectives of this thesis, one of its objectives is to compare the gap between academic recommendations and industry practices of DMS website evaluation (see page 48). According to the nature of this objective, it was considered how the two perspectives (academic and those of destination managers) apply such critical reflection. Practitioners (destination managers) use critical reflection as a means for explicating their implicit and often unconscious intentions and motivations, what might be termed their personal theories that underpin everyday practice (Freshwater and Rolfe 2001). However, researchers critically reflect on practice as the instrument for generating evidence. In this sense, both use critical reflection as a 'divining rod' for producing evidence and for revealing to themselves their own creative processes. However, there are no critical reflection steps for following the drive towards concrete models and formulaic approaches (Freshwater and Rolfe 2001). Furthermore, no published paper exists regarding a universal process for analysing and interpreting evidence in DMS website evaluation, and whether this evidence is generated through qualitative enquiry, scientific investigation or reflection on individual experience. Therefore, this section aims to provide logic to the process of critically reflecting on evidence.

In attempting to identify a process for critical reflection, this study did not intend to distinguish between methodological and philosophical differences within the research findings. This thesis is not convinced that such differences actually exist. Neither has it explicitly problematised the central concepts of reflection or experience, although it could be argued that the very nature of the thesis illuminates some of the tensions inherent in the concepts of evaluation under interrogation. Therefore, a pragmatic view will allow for avoiding having to treat this research data as belonging to scientific or non-scientific paradigms. This section argues that science is useful, but not the only form of enquiry that can lead to knowledge.

As a starting point, the researcher turned her attention to arguments that account for the usefulness of data derived from the various research methods and instruments

applied to this thesis, rather than to concerns about how the data gathered for this thesis represented the topic.

The researcher felt that this section needed to distinguish between theory and knowledge. Theory is a way of ordering beliefs in a descriptive, explanatory or predictive framework. Knowledge is a rather more complex concept. An account of knowledge should accommodate the proposition that a person making a knowledge claim must have reason to think that a particular belief is true (Rorty 1979). The pragmatic view between the two perspectives in this instance indicates that it is not the means of production of the data that constitutes the criterion to justify a knowledge claim; rather, it is the quality of the critical reflection on that data and the creative attempt to weave beliefs based on these data.

7.4.1 Hypothesis and prediction

Collected data cannot be separated from theory and theory derives its credibility from the success in handling data (Rorty 1979). Theories may exist despite contradictory knowledge, accepted fact, or scientific findings, but accommodations in the researcher's beliefs should be made to avoid internal inconsistencies (Rorty 1999). Therefore, it was decided to critically engage with all modes of evidence, including the existing knowledge of DMS website evaluation, through critical reflection rather than accumulating more evidence. The need arose to explore new and innovative ways of treating data collection within this research, keeping in mind that it is not always the quantity or quality of the evidence that counts, but how the evidence is applied.

Therefore, hypothetical reasoning was adopted while conducting the critical reflection between the two perspectives (academic and destination management). The processes of hypothetical reasoning pertaining to the data would provide a means for tolerating uncertainty, ambivalence, ambiguity and inconsistency (Rorty 1979). A pragmatic approach would also allow for eschewing a prescriptive view of epistemology and to construct different paradigms of enquiry. The argument here is that if a formulated hypothesis can be justified, then other related consequences that can be anticipated for new theories must exist. The outcome, therefore, is regarded as a set of evidence-based hypotheses that are proposed rather than asserted. This, in turn, will contribute to knowledge that can be evaluated in terms of pragmatic criteria, which are already being used for this research (suitability and simplicity). Evidence-based hypotheses may provide reasons for accepting those

hypotheses that will make the most sense within the context of the evaluation. It will enhance consistency within the literature, either by making new connections or confirming existing theories. A pragmatic approach toward justifying such hypotheses is always essential for further studies.

Critical reflection was adopted alongside hypothetical reasoning for this research. This involved making conjectures in order to reduce evidence down to units of meaning within a theoretical context. Interpretation between the two perspectives attempted to create an explanatory story that would shed new light on the meaning of the data. This combines with predicting what might account for, looking for consistency with the data.

7.4.2 Critical reflection

First, the instrument for generating data in both cases, i.e., the academic and industry perspective is the individual. However, the understanding gained from this critical reflection is constructed through dialogue with the data, rather than received from the data. The individual is the channel, the creator of evidence and most importantly, the medium for critiquing the data. Second, critical reflection engaged in a dialogue with data and applied the logic of hypothetical reasoning in order to create new combinations and connections between theories and practice.

7.4.2.1 DMS website evaluation approaches

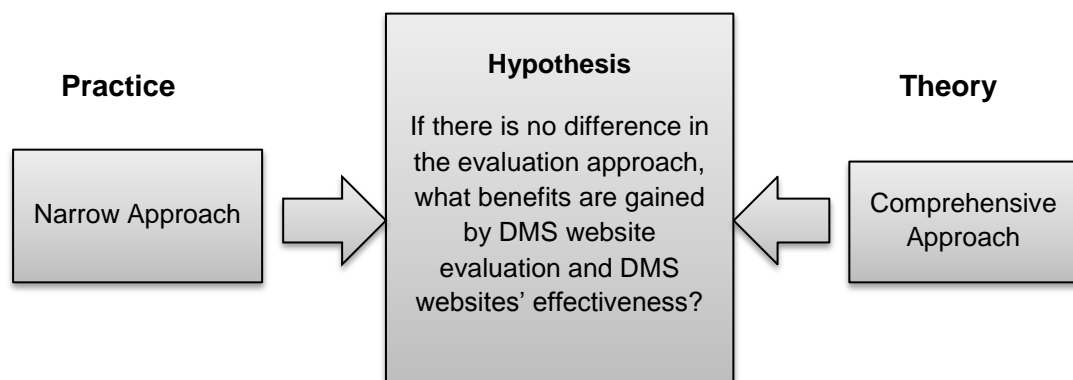


Figure 7.1 Evaluation Approach Reflection

As seen in Figure 7.1, the hypothesis formed here is that if there is no difference in the evaluation approach between the two perspectives, leading to the question,

what benefits are there to DMS website evaluation and DMS websites' effectiveness? This hypothesis will stimulate further research into an investigation of this issue from a range of disciplines in order to eliminate the current difference.

For establishing the current, up-to-date reality of DMS website evaluation, the researcher gained an understanding of its contemporary evaluation by exploring the contexts of evaluation described by academics and practitioners. The generation of knowledge leads to a greater understanding of how to achieve a more comprehensive approach within the industry and will stimulate further research to assist in the delivery of comprehensive evaluation within the industry.

An initial review of the literature established a lack of knowledge in relation to where the industry derives their expectations of DMS evaluation, as well as a lack of knowledge about the main obstacles for achieving effective evaluation. Results from the online survey data analysis chapter illuminated and explained some of these issues. The nature of the organizational environment and its effect on the DMS evaluation approach can also be established with a view toward addressing issues of role conflict, caused by organizational and professional demands. Within the framework of social constructionism, the way in which the environment interacts with will also allow for further research to explore the complexities of DMS evaluation in industry acute evaluation settings.

An aggregation that led to a cross participant analysis of the DMS website evaluation, as well as the assertions emerging from industry experience as a whole emphasized the intricacies of evaluation, enabled the researcher to acknowledge the current evaluation process and to make generalizations about the information gained from this research. According to the primary identified concept of destination management and working environment, it was identified that a marketing team establishes and maintains an illusion of DMS website evaluation. Differences exist between the two perspectives in terms of evaluation as it relates to adopted criteria and dimensions. However, destination management industries deflect criticism by citing poor funding and due to the adoption of a systematic evaluation approach. Destination management departments want and need to promote DMS websites internationally; as a result, they collude with staff to develop a process of evaluation by attending conferences or through networks.

Figure 7.1 shows the emerging hypothesis that a complicit relationship exists between the two perspectives. This can be illustrated using three broad areas

identified in the research. These areas will be discussed from destination management perspectives to show how collusion might occur in relation to the notion of comprehensive DMS website evaluation. These areas are:

1. Experience of evaluation
2. Organizational context of evaluation
3. Interactions between academia and industry relationships

7.4.2.1 7.4.2.1 Experience of DMS website evaluation

The first area that emerged from this research and informed an understanding of the destination management construction as it pertains to actual evaluation was that of experiences of evaluation. Destination management had low expectations of evaluation, illustrated via the decision making and choice of DMS evaluation approaches.

The non-critical and accepting responses of destination management participants to the DMS website evaluation reflects the nature of the experience and how the destination management constructed that experience as a means of making sense of their DMS website evaluation reality. It would seem that destination management constructs a reality they can accept as a means of being comfortable within the DMS evaluation environment. The outcome of this might lead to DMS website evaluation and its effectiveness being confronted; on the other hand, the academic approach may not include an awareness of actual evaluation experiences.

In gaining an understanding of how a destination management group construct their evaluation experiences, new knowledge emerged. It became apparent from the analysis that destination management constructed their own experience of evaluation, regardless of the feedback reported at conferences or via networking. By doing this, they may rationalize their experiences as comprehensive. This is likely to lead to a narrow approach when there has been little to destination management' expectations of actual DMS website evaluation within the academic sector due to a lack of comparative situations. There is potential for further research into this area.

Regarding decision-making and choice within DMS website evaluation approaches, the opportunity of the marketing team within the organization to make choices regarding aspects of evaluation was clear. However, responses in the destination management survey were clearly able to articulate the obstacles of a DMS website evaluation that to also a systemic approach and structure within their experiences

when making these choices within the evaluation. Thus, destination management deflected any reasons from academic sectors by identifying the organizational factors that influenced their DMS website experience. The responses expressed that there is a need for a systematic approach and structure to enable the smooth running of DMS website evaluation. Destination management were also aware of some evaluation dimensions that academia uses; in reality, however, the way in which destination management adopted the evaluation couched the question the assumption was that the DMS website evaluation is narrow. Destination management, although recognising some of the evaluation dimensions for DMS website evaluation in these strategies, was not significant enough to see them produce a comprehensive evaluation of DMS website evaluation.

Destination management categorically stated that they often update their evaluation process within one year, and some did within one month. However, the reality of the destination management experience is one; not of being disempowered but rather, as they do not know the procedures or the approaches of DMS website evaluation. No one wants to take the wrong approach for DMS website evaluation. The responses in the destination management survey identified to some degree the DMS website evaluation process (in terms of their DMS website evaluation experience) as being important to their evaluation of experiences. Possibly, to some extent, organizational factors yielded this evaluation.

Destination management also reflected on the academic experience of evaluation through the approach of learning about good DMS practices and its evaluation concerns. Industry participants perceived discussions with inter-organizational staff to be less influential than attending conferences and networking in order to learn about good DMS website evaluation practices. They acknowledged academic DMS website experiences within this domain; this indicates the notion identified by them to turn to an academic perspective to learn about good approaches within DMS website evaluation.

7.4.2.2 Organizational context of DMS website evaluation

The second area to emerge from the research was that of the organizational contexts of evaluation. An understanding of the organizational context of DMS website evaluation and its effects on the evaluation experience is crucial for developing knowledge of destination management's construction of their

experience. The impact of these contexts of evaluation on the overall evaluation environment will also influence destination management's experiences of evaluation. This area can be addressed by considering the reliability of DMS website evaluation staff and resource issues.

Destination management clearly indicated that the digital marketing team was responsible for the DMS website evaluation, followed by the head of digital management. Destination management responses did not specifically identify or explain how they knew that the conducted evaluation approaches were effective or comprehensive, and it seemed as if this was a self-generating belief among them. It appears that there may exist a shortage of qualified staff, or that experiences in this area may be affected the approach they adopt to DMS website evaluation. Destination management responses did not comment on a lack of human resources in terms of DMS website evaluation, but clearly identified organizational aspects of evaluation that affected their experiences. These fell into the category of DMS websites as it related to the suitability of human resources evaluation staff. According to the views of destination management, developing a systematic approach for DMS website evaluation was the major aspect that affected DMS website experiences. Extending or changing roles within the destination was seen as potentially effective and could have an impact on the evaluation process. The ability to adapt to a changing environment and the intention to bring change to the organization positively helps to achieve DMS success. Certain factors, such as a lack of know-how and ability, lack of organizational competence and lack of marketing or promotional skills could lead to DMS failure (UNCTAD 2005). Sigala (2009) found collaboration between organizations and interorganisational relationships to be as important to DMS success. Frew and O'Connor (1999) showed that not only technology but also distribution, effective management and operational issues are important for DMS success.

7.4.2.3 Interactions in the academia and industry relationship

The third and final area to emerge within this thesis was that of interactions and relationships between the two perspectives (academic and destination management). The research results made it clear that significant dissonance existed between the two perspectives, which may be the cause for the current differences in evaluation approaches. The layout of the environment between the two perspectives may have a significant effect on the quality of the adopted DMS website evaluation

approaches, as well as those being developed. The major strategy applied was that of the development of DMS evaluation approaches in order to gain a desired result, i.e., effective evaluation, rather than using a destination management (industry) centred approach to develop such evaluation frameworks. Therefore, there is a need for additional research to develop a support system to ensure focused involvement between academia and industry in the area of DMS website evaluation.

Insufficient use of academic knowledge may be explained by academic “illiteracy” or difficulties in reading and understanding scholarly texts (Chapman and Kern 2012). Four main barriers have been put forward; relevance, language, access and time. Some practitioners evidently do not perceive scholarly knowledge as being valuable or relevant (Storbacka 2012). Cohen (2007) stressed that scholarly knowledge remains unused if it is not proved applicable and embedded in daily business practice. Cohen (2007) also pointed out that scholarly knowledge may remain unused if it is only published in academic journals. Such journals are not perceived as very attractive sources of knowledge, due to different communication practices (Bartunek and Rynes 2014).

If practitioners find the academic literature difficult, vague or abstract, they will not perceive it as attractive, and they will not apply it to their daily business practices (Bartunek and Rynes 2014). The access barrier refers to limited access to various journals and related publications, and the time limitations suggest that managers are hindered in exploring such knowledge because of the current, fast-paced business environment (Bartunek and Rynes 2014).

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter drew on the presentation and initial analysis of the data in the previous six chapters to develop an in-depth discussion and critical review of destination management systems’ (DMS) website experiences from two perspectives (academia and industry). Hence, this chapter passed over the limitations of the previous descriptive and narrative destination website evaluation approaches, and formed the basis for actual and critical reflection pertaining to the up-to-date evaluation of DMS websites from both of the stated perspectives. Three areas were identified that need to be thoroughly considered in the literature review: experiences of DMS website evaluation, the organizational context of DMS website evaluation

and interactions between academia and industry concerning DMS website evaluation.

Chapter 8: **Conclusions**

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the final conclusions of the study. This chapter highlights the main contributions of the study in terms of its theoretical contributions and practical implications. It also discusses the limitations that emerged while conducting this study, and suggests some directions for further research.

8.2 Research Summary

The aim of this thesis is to investigate contemporary thinking on DMS website' evaluation from both academic and destination management's perspectives. The thesis first adopted an existing evaluation framework for evaluating the effectiveness of DMS websites — the Horan and Frew (2010) model — to update and refine the way in which academic experts regarded evaluation dimensions and criteria. Therefore, this thesis seeks to update the theory in the area of DMS website evaluation. It begins by employing three rounds of Delphi study to identify an up-to-date definition for DMS, an up-to-date list of DMS aims, an up-to-date list of key dimensions, and criteria for DMS websites evaluation. The validity and reliability of this study was maintained through the careful selection of panel participants and through the selection of studies and articles in addition to the consistency of data collection and delivery. A consensus regarding the criteria and dimensions of this method was reached and determined through descriptive and statistical rating tools.

On the other hand, this thesis was developed to discover what (destination management) industry is actually adopting when evaluating the effectiveness of their DMS websites. Recently, concern over the gap between theory about what people do and what people actually do has given rise to the 'practice' approach in the management literature. Literature on knowing in practice suggests that knowledge is not something that organisations have but is something that organisations do (Cook and Brown 1999). Therefore, this thesis was developed to capture and explore the practice of the DMS website evaluation which underpins the existing destination management regarding their DMS website evaluation. The investigation of practice has reflected the reality of DMS website evaluation as it actually exists and is used

by industry, rather than as it may appear or might be imagined. In order to investigate what the industry is actually adopting when evaluating the effectiveness of their destination websites, interviews as well as an online survey were used and data was collected from 46 official destination websites, including country, city and region websites (see Appendix X). They were asked about their adopted DMS website evaluation approaches, dimensions, criteria and other relevant questions to evaluation within the organisation.

Results found that destination management (industry) practices adopt and exhibit a narrow view of DMS website effectiveness evaluation. The online survey demonstrated that there is a little congruence and consensus between academic experts and industry (practice) in terms of the evaluation dimensions that are most crucial for DMS website evaluation. The majority of evaluation dimensions which were identified by academic panels in the Delphi study as being crucial and necessary to include in a comprehensive DMS website evaluation have been used as well by industry. Hence, the results confirm somehow parallel with most of the dimensions with respect to both academic and industry perspectives. However, the online survey indicated that ninety-one [91] evaluation criteria for DMS website evaluation were totally ignored by industry. The destination management (the industry) is using approaches that are more restricted in evaluation criteria.

8.3 Contributions of this Research

Research has examined the extent to which evaluation criteria and dimensions are the best-practice 'ideal' of DMS website effectiveness evaluation in the reality of everyday practice, and it provides some important background and context to this issue (e.g. park and Gretzel 2007; Chiou et al. 2010; Horan and Frew 2010; Tanrisevdi and Duran 2011; Del Vasto-Terrientes et al. 2015). However, despite the considerable research and effort spent on the evaluation of DMS website effectiveness, no attention has been paid to investigating what is implemented into routine industry practice. Therefore, the goal of this study was to better understand and explore contemporary DMS website evaluation from not only an academic perspective, but also an industry perspective.

Having identified the number of inadequacies and gaps in the knowledge that clearly need to be addressed, this study is important from both a theoretical and practical perspective. This research contributes to a greater knowledge about the Destination

Management Systems (DMS) website effectiveness and evaluation in the tourism domain. In particular, this research attempts to fill knowledge gap to contribute to knowledge for academic researchers as follows:

8.3.1 Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to the DMS literature by organising a literature review of DMS website effectiveness evaluation measurements. It does so in a way that allows for the identification of research opportunities related to this topic and which may stimulate debate and future research. In reviewing the literature and presenting a detailed view of comprehensive DMS website evaluation, it was demonstrated that most of the literature on DMS is narrow in scope, focusing either on evaluation dimensions or criteria, or seek to build evaluation models that neglect a comprehensive account of exiting models. This research presented a literature review that enhanced the understanding of DMS websites and their comprehensive evaluation. It is hoped that this contribution may encourage research, particularly in terms of developing and enhancing the most comprehensive models of DMS website evaluation.

The literature review revealed the most comprehensive and holistic DMS website effectiveness evaluation models present in the literature (e.g., Young Hoon and Mincheol 2010; Horan and Frew 2010). This thesis contributes to knowledge by identifying the most up-to-date dimensions and criteria that academic experts believe should be included in a comprehensive evaluation of DMS websites. Thus, the review has brought the theories related to this topic, i.e., DMS website evaluation, into an updated and refined forum. The author hopes that this will motivate future research on the development of a comprehensive evaluation approach for DMS websites, based on these identified dimensions and criteria.

This thesis also contributes to knowledge by confirming the rising emergence of social media as the new important component of DMS websites. It contributes to knowledge through the identification of new suggestions concerning the aims of DMS, which are: to support sustainable destination management, to empower and support tourism firms, to enable collaboration at the destination, to increase consumer satisfaction levels and to capture consumer data. Furthermore, it contributes to knowledge through identification of new suggestions regarding the evaluation dimensions of DMS websites, which are: sustainability, marketing, collaboration issues and the goals of the website.

Additionally, this thesis contributes to knowledge by reviewing the effectiveness of DMS website evaluation from a destination management perspective. The importance of DMS website evaluation has been addressed by many scholars. However, research focusing on the industry's approach to evaluating DMS websites remains scarce. This research also contributes to tourism literature by exploring an area of research from an industry perspective, which had previously been neglected. The research allowed for different aspects of DMS website evaluation, as it brought together and reviewed destination management experiences of evaluation. By gaining a total view of the actual evaluation of DMS websites from a management perspective, knowledge of the current evaluation of DMS websites within an organisational context could be developed.

New knowledge emerged from this data that showed that destination management used knowledge gained from networking and conferences regarding DMS website evaluation, along with knowledge gained by their staff at meetings and conferences. This resulted in an overall, generalised and non-critical evaluation of their DMS website evaluation.

Other new knowledge was identified by establishing that destination management was clearly able to identify the evaluation dimensions of their DMS websites within the context and in relation to the aims and objectives of DMS websites. They identified some of the evaluation criteria of their DMS website evaluation, although these were not as diverse as they could have been due to a variety of factors. Several aspects of the organisational context of DMS website evaluation were clearly observed by destination management to impact on the evaluation experience, and these aspects should be addressed. They included a lack of funding, an appropriate systemic approach, return on investments and external factors that affected the organisation.

The lack of funding seemed to affect evaluation in terms of its process and its effectiveness. From a destination management perspective, the marketing team is the most influential department in the evaluation process and the related evaluation criteria. This leads to narrow evaluation of DMS websites, which in turn provides less effective insights to the evaluation process. New approaches demanded by the organisation should be effected through an extended role in order to deliver effective evaluation. To address issues related to business, perceived collaboration within the

organisation should redesign business factors to reflect the comprehensive and effective evaluation that exists in the current DMS website evaluation literature.

Finally, this research contributes to knowledge by confirming that there is no congruence and consensus between academic experts and industry in terms of DMS website evaluation criteria and evaluation approaches. This thesis highlights an urgent need to investigate this critical issue in order to better benefit from academic research results on this topic, and accordingly, to improve the evaluation of DMS websites within the industry.

If practitioners find the academic literature difficult, vague or abstract, they will not perceive it as attractive, and they will not apply it to their daily business practices. The limited access to various journals and related publications, and the time limitations suggest that managers are hindered in exploring such knowledge because of the current, fast-paced business environment.

1.1.1 Practical implications

This research attempts to fill a knowledge gap by contributing to knowledge regarding practice. The findings of this study carry implications for the practice of evaluating DMS website effectiveness in relation to evaluation dimensions, criteria and the approaches to DMS. Managers can benefit from many of the outcomes and as a result improve their DMS effectiveness evaluation. The research provides guidelines that can help managers to explore what needs to be considered in order to evaluate their DMS websites' effectiveness.

The researcher intends to disseminate the findings in several ways. An executive summary will be presented to the participating destination members. The summary will present the critical reflection between the two perspectives that this thesis addressed. This may challenge views and raise awareness of the issues that emerged from the study. Furthermore, there is the intention to produce several research papers based on the findings for publication in tourism and information technology journals, with abstracts submitted to relevant national and international conferences for scrutiny and selection for presentation.

The researcher has identified several areas of knowledge in terms of personal outcomes that were gained by undertaking this research. The results of the research highlighted cognitive dissonance between actual evaluation within the industry and professional academia, and the effects of this on effective DMS website evaluation.

Furthermore, the evidence's lack of indicating a shared philosophy of DMS website evaluation amongst practitioners was unsurprising. The two perspectives' (academic and destination management) results caused the researcher to reflect on current DMS website evaluation and addressing three specific areas of importance: the experiences of evaluation, the organizational context of evaluation, as well as interactions between academia and the industry.

Of particular interest to the researcher has been the knowledge gained regarding actual DMS website evaluation within the industry, which enlivened and enlightened the research process. In relation to the research process itself, much was learned about the value of undertaking research that focuses on the context and experience of both theory and practice, in addition to the analysis, discussion and critical reflection between theory and practice. The intensive literature review allowed the researcher to establish current DMS website evaluation from an academic point of view. The research was developed by returning to primary sources during the literature reviewing stage, which was insightful, as one realized that by using this approach, much of the published literature was aimed at developing evaluation frameworks, approaches and models for DMS, while ignoring how destination management develops these frameworks. The researcher has learned that there is an urgent need to reflect between theory and practice in order to establish better professional values and beliefs within the academic field.

8.4 Further Research

Several areas for further research emerged, to allow greater understanding of the DMS website evaluation experience. Further research is necessary to develop a support system and ensure a focused involvement of both academia and industry in DMS website evaluation. Additional research is required to develop dissemination strategies that bridge the gap between the two communities and enable academic research findings, approaches and framework of DMS website evaluation to be adopted or recognized by destination management (practitioners). Further research is required in this area to re-think about the research utilisation in terms of 'knowledge transformation'. This mean to think about a 'knowledge-led, problem-constrained learning process. This shift in research would focus on researcher-as-disseminator to practitioner-as-learner, which would encourages a multidimensional

rather than a unidimensional view of the process of DMS website evaluation and ultimately a research implementation.

Insufficient use of academic knowledge may be explained by academic “illiteracy” or difficulties in reading and understanding scholarly texts. People won’t use what they don’t understand. Some practitioners evidently do not perceive scholarly knowledge as being valuable or relevant. Scholarly knowledge remains unused if it is not proved applicable and embedded in daily business practice. Furthermore, scholarly knowledge may remain unused if it is only published in academic journals. However, such journals are not perceived as very attractive sources of knowledge, and this could be due to different communication practices.

8.5 Limitation

As with any piece of work, this study is subject to several limitations and constraints attributable to time, place and resource boundaries. These limitations may impinge on the instrument design and data collection technique as well as the generalisation. A limitation of this study could be the relatively small number of academics who participated in the Delphi study. A larger number of samples could provide a broader perspective or new dimensions in the practical field of destination website evaluation. However, the qualifications of the panellists from the academic sectors and the variety of the criteria they approved could mitigate this limitation. Furthermore, a small number of destination manager interviews could also be another limitation. A limitation of this study could be the information provided by the participants from the destinations regarding their DMS website evaluation. However, additional research in this field focusing on this issue will add to greater understanding of the DMS website evaluation from destination management perspectives.

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Appendix I. Delphi Study Members

Delphi Members Who Participated in Two or More Rounds of the Delphi Study	
Name	Organization
Alessandro Inversini	Webatelier.net University of Lugano, Switzerland
Rodolfo Baggio	Bocconi university, Milan, Italy
Andreas H. Zins	Institute for tourism and leisure studies, University of Economics and Business Administration, Vienna, Austria
Rob law	School of Hotel and Tourism Management, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Ulrike Gretzel	Laboratory for intelligent system in tourism department of recreation, park and tourism sciences Texas and M university USA.
Nicole Mitsche	School of arts, Design, media and culture, university of Sunderland, UK
Udo Gottlieb	University of Queensland, Australia
Roland Schegg	Lausanne Hospitality Research (LHR), Switzerland
Francois Bedard	School of Business Administration, L'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)
Bing Pan	School of Business and Economics, College of Charleston, USA
Lorenzo Cantoni	Webatelier.net Faculty of Communication, Sciences, University of Lugano, Switzerland
Chris Greenwood	VisitScotland.com
Desere Koko	Central University of Technology
Christos Makris	N
Tom Buncle	Yellow Railroad
Paul Baron	Tourism Victoria

Appendix II. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants

Dear Prof. Law,

My name is Nesrin Sourak and I hold an assistant lecturer post at Damascus University, and I am currently a PhD candidate at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, in the field of Tourism Marketing. I have attached a copy of my professional profile. At present I am conducting a research project with Professor Andrew J. Frew, Queen Margaret University, entitled Developing an Effectiveness Evaluation Framework for the Syrian Tourism Website.

I have attached a brief overview of the project entitled 'Research Background'. The purpose of this study is to refine and validate a website effectiveness evaluation tool through implementation in the official website of the Syrian tourism ministry. In order to achieve this aim, five different perspectives will be compiled to gather data from panel experts, customers, accommodation suppliers, the DMO management team, an eMetric evaluation and a collection of data from other inputs. The results from each of the previous perspectives of this evaluation phase will be integrated into the model to update and refine it and then to evaluate the effectiveness of the Syrian tourism website. The study will provide a range of detailed advice and suggestions for management actions which should significantly assist that and help to improve the Syrian tourism website, but perhaps more importantly it will further validate the model and provide a basis for comparative study.

This research will use a mix of two different approaches, one qualitative and the other quantitative. The first step is to conduct a Delphi study. The Delphi study is based on a qualitative research procedure which is comprised of a series of rounds, sent to a carefully selected panel of experts to elicit opinion within a particular field of study. The expert panel for this study, of which you are invited to be a member, is comprised of experts from both academic and industry fields. A Delphi study does not require face-to-face participation and the experts will remain anonymous until the study is complete.

The Delphi study will consist of three consecutive emailed questionnaires and will last for about eight weeks. It is the only part of my research in which I am asking for your participation, although I will be more than happy to keep you informed of progress. The findings from the initial round will influence and shape the questions in the two subsequent rounds. The opening questionnaire will try to obtain a broad range of possible criteria and dimensions for the measurement of destination website effectiveness. You can complete it through this link <https://surveys.qmu.ac.uk/delphistudyroundone/>

It will take only a few minutes to complete.

Your involvement is important because the aims of the research cannot be achieved without your participation as professional experts. Once the data are collected, your results will form part of a larger database: only group data will be reported from this. Please note that you will have access to the results of this study and you will be able to recognize if your thoughts differ from other experts. If you have any concerns during or after the completion of your questionnaire, you are encouraged to discuss these at any time, either with me or with Professor Frew.

Yours Sincerely,

Nesrin Sourak.

Appendix III. Round I Questionnaire

Delphi Study-Round One

- 1. Here is the definition from previous research, which is considered to be the latest updated definition of DMS.**

“Destination Management Systems (DMS) are systems that consolidate and distribute a comprehensive range of tourism products through a variety of channels and platforms, generally catering for a specific region, and supporting the activities of a destination management organization (DMO) within that region. DMS attempt to utilize a customer centric approach in order to manage and market a destination as a holistic entity, typically providing strong destination related information, real-time reservations, and destination management tools and paying particular attention to supporting small and independent tourism suppliers”.

Do you agree with this definition? Or do you think that this definition needs refining and modifying? If so, what points should be added to this definition?

--

- 2. According to the most recent research, the aims of DMS are:**

- To effectively co-ordinate the marketing activities and branding of a specific destination and the comprehensive range of products it has to offer,
- To provide timely, accurate, unbiased, quality assured destination and product based information (both accommodation and non-accommodation),
- To facilitate the effective distribution and sale of a comprehensive range of tourism products from a destination,
- To present the destination as a holistic entity displaying a destination orientation rather than product orientation.
- To provide an appropriate and sustainable relationship building mechanisms with customers through effective, meaningful and continuous communication,
- To increase the satisfaction level of its suppliers, the local community and all its stakeholders. (To build and maintain a meaningful relationship with it stakeholders)
- To facilitate the management of a destination by supporting DMO activities and through the provision of tools, support and training for its stakeholders.

Do you think there are new updated aims for DMS? If yes, what new aims would you add?

3. What areas should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of a destination websites?

4. What criteria should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of a destination websites as a distribution channel?

5. Any additional comments?

Thank you for participate

Appendix IV. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants-Round

Dear Mr. Agote

You are kindly invited to participate in the Second round of Delphi study conduct by Nesrin Sourak, a PhD candidate in the school of Arts, Social Sciences and Management at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. This Delphi study is a part of research project to further develop an effectiveness evaluation framework for destination websites. In order to achieve this aim, five different perspectives will be compiled to gather data from

- panel experts,
- customers,
- accommodation suppliers,
- the DMO management team,
- an eMetric evaluation and a collection of data from other inputs.

The results from each of the previous perspectives of this evaluation phase will be integrated into the model to update and refine it and then to evaluate the effectiveness of tourism websites. The study will provide a range of detailed advice and suggestions for management actions which should significantly assist that and help to improve (for example) the Syrian tourism website, but perhaps more importantly it will further validate the model and provide a basis for comparative study.

The previous stage of this study has already received a broad range of possible criteria and dimensions for the measurement of destination website effectiveness. In this round, outcomes have been gathered and are presented for you to review and revise overall responses to each question. This will enable consent and consensus between participants on content and construction of the study. Any relevant further standards that you believe as being applicable should also be integrated at this stage of the procedure. In order to take part in the panel you will need to click on the link below, it takes around 15 minutes to complete.

<https://surveys.qmu.ac.uk/delphistudyroundtwo>

Your contribution is highly appreciated. For the next 2 weeks, you may access the Delphi panel using the link above. Please note that all experts remain anonymous.

Best regards, Nesrin

Appendix V. Round II Questionnaire

Instructions:

Thank you very much for fulfilling the first round of the Delphi study. Outcomes have been examined and are presented for you to revision in the second Delphi questionnaire.

The purpose of the second Delphi round is to allow you to check and upgrade overall responses to each question. This will enable consent between participants on content and construction of the study. Any proper further standards that you believe as being applicable should also be integrated at this stage of the procedure. You can complete it through this link <https://surveys.qmu.ac.uk/delphistudyroundone/>. It will take only a few minutes to complete.

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this study. Your time and input is much appreciated. If you would like to obtain further information on the study I would be delighted to hear from you.

Section 1: Definition of a Destination Management System.

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire is try to come to an agreement regarding an appropriate definition for Destination Management Systems and it integral parts. In Round One of the Delphi study participants were asked to identify a proposed definition of DMS and make any supplements that they believed were proper. These statements and additions were gathered and characterized in the following questions.

1. Please specify how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statements: A Definition of a Destination Management Systems (DMS) should:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Expand The Variety Of Products On Offer					
Include An explaining How The DMS Collect Data					
Include An explaining How The DMS Maintains and Distribute Data					
Explain How It Differ From Other Forms of Online Distribution.					
Include An Awareness About Ownership and Control					
Include Distribution Functions Such As Transactional Functionality and Office Tasks					
Include The Term “Inter Organizational Systems”					
Include Marketing Functions Such as CRM					
Focus On The Scope and Strategies Aims Of DMS As Well As At Its Nature and Entity Rather Than Its Functions					
Include Some Requirement On The Quality Of The Content Searching Services Supplied.					
Include The Term “An Integral Component Of The Destination Marketing Strategy”					
Include The Term “ An Effective DMS is A Critical Part Of The Customer Journey Towards Identifying, Selecting and Visiting A Destination”					

2. Do you feel that there are any supplements that you would like to add to the statements in Question 1?

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. If you have answered “Yes” to Question 2 please explain your reasoning.

4. Do you feel that there are any changes that you would like to make to the selection in Question 1?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. If you have answered “Yes” to Question 4 please explain your reasoning.

6. Do you feel that any of the statements in Question 1 are unnecessary and should be removed?

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. If you have answered “Yes” to Question 6 please explain your reasoning.

Section 2: The Aim of a Destination Management System.

The purpose of this part of the questionnaire is to try to come to an agreement regarding the aims of a DMS.

8. Please specify how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement regarding the aims of a DMS. The aims of a DMS-based website are to:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Cover Costs					
Support Sustainable Destination Management					
Empower and Support Tourism Firms					
Enable Collaboration At The Destination					
Enable Tourism Firms In Tourism					
Destination Governance					
Support The Collection Of Tourism Data					
Support The Collection Of Tourism					
Satellite Accounts					
Provide Something On ROI					
Capture Consumer Data					
Increase Consumer Satisfaction level					

9. Are there any other objectives that in your opinion deserve insertion in the above list?

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. If you have answered “Yes” to Question 9 please explain your reasoning.

11. In your opinion, should any of the goals be removed from the list (Question 8)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

12. If you have answered “Yes” to Question 11 please explain your reasoning.

13. Should any of the above aims (Question 8) be revised in any way?

Yes ☐ No ☐

14. If you have answered “Yes” please explain your reasoning.

Section 3: Areas of Evaluation of Destination Management System Effectiveness.

There are a number of areas that should be assessed when evaluating the effectiveness of DMS. The evaluations areas identified by the participants in Round One of the Delphi Study are defined below but we need to come to an agreement about areas of Evaluation of Destination Management System Effectiveness.

15. Please specify how strongly you agree/disagree with the following areas of effectiveness:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Visibility Conversion Rates Amount of Visitors Usability Persuasiveness Marketing Management Sustainability Tourism Governance Collaboration Issues					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
ROI Content Design and Navigation Customer Centric Performance Commerce Value of Trip Visitor Expenditure Goals of The Website Communication With Visitors					

16. Are there any other areas that in your opinion should be involved in the above list?

Yes ☐ No ☐

17. If you have answered "Yes" please explain your reasoning.

18. In your opinion, are any of the evaluation areas that should be removed (Question 15)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

19. If you have answered "Yes" please explain your reasoning.

20. Should any of the evaluation areas be revised in any way (Question 15)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

21. If you have answered "Yes" please explain your reasoning.

Section 4: Criteria Employed to Assess Destination Management System Effectiveness.

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire is to come to an agreement as to what criteria should be involved in an e-metric evaluation of a DMS based website.

22. Please specify how strongly you agree/disagree with the following criteria that should be engaged during website evaluation:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
How Many People Visited The Website					
How Many Converted To Visitors					
How Visible Are The Website On Major Search Engines					
All Majors That Have Been Developed From A Consumer Perspective					
The Needs Of The Small Tourism Providers It Is Supposed To Support					
Bookings					
Promotions					
Destination Awareness					
Tourist Satisfaction					
Destination Loyalty					
Destination Image					
Persuasiveness					
Objective and Subjective Criteria					
Conversion Levels					
Reservations					
Sales					
What Were The Main Reasons For Visiting					
To What Extent Did The DMS Actually Influence The Decision To Visit					
Click-through %					
Impact on Destination Brand					
Promotion					
SEO					
Reduce Perception Gap					
Accuracy (Content)					
Content Quality					
Freshness - up to date					
Comprehensive Product Range					
Content					
Content Comprehensiveness					
Intelligibility of Text					
Stickiness					
Product Comparison					
Focus					
Percentage of Supplier Participation					
Range of Content Providers					
Content Uniqueness					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Knowledge Creation					
Absence of Errors					
Cost of Sales					
Cost per Contact					
Customer Interaction					
Customer Recollection					
Demand Forecasting					
Multiple Language					
No. of Emails Voluntered					
Return on Investment					
Value Added Features					
Slipperiness					
Accessibility					
Aesthetics					
Findability					
Length of Stay					
Privacy					
Usability - Suppliers Perspective					
Usability (inc Navigation)					
Use of Graphics					
Usefulness					
24-7 365 Day Operation					
Integration with Suppliers Systems					
Interoperability					
Regional-National Integration					
Reliability					
Robustness					
Seamless					
Speed of Response					
DMS % of Overall Sales					
Dynamic Packaging					
Percentage of Suppliers getting Bookings					
Real Time Availability					
Reservation Effectiveness					
Reservation for non-accommodation					
Secure Transaction					
Value of Sales					
Value of Visitors					
Volume of Sales					
Cater For Target Markets					
Cultivate Customer Relationship					
Customer Satisfaction					
Identify Target Markets					
Personalisation					
Reaching Target Market					
Stakeholder Satisfaction					
Achievement of DMS Aims					
Added Value					
Barriers to Entry-Exit					
Channel Integration					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Depends on DMO Aims					
Internal level of integration					
No of Partners					
Ownership of Inventory					
Supplier Feedback					
Type of Partners					
Visitors to Destination					
Acquisition Costs					
Average Costs of Different Behaviors					
Balanced Cost of Participation					
Cost per Reservation					
Internal Returns					
Transaction Cost Suppliers					
Geographical Spread					
Percentage of Suppliers getting Visits					
Reach Percentage					
Traffic					
Visitor Sessions					
Volume of Hits					
Volume of Page Views					
Volume of Visitors – Reach					
Acquisition					
Abandonment					
Attrition					
Conversion Change Percentage					
New Registrations					
No of logins					
No of Registered Users					
Offline Conversion					
Online Conversion					
Total Conversion					
Churn					
Retention					
Frequency					
Loyalty					
Volume of Revisits					

23. Are there any other criteria that in your opinion merit inclusion in the above list?

Yes ☐ No ☐

24. If you have answered “Yes” please explain your reasoning.

25. In your opinion, are any of these criteria redundant and should be removed (Question 22)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

26. If you have answered “Yes” please explain your reasoning.

27. Are there any amendments that you would like to make to the above criteria (Question 22)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

28. If you have answered “Yes” please explain your reasoning.

Section 5: Additional Comments:

29. Please include any additional comments that you may have.

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix VI. Invitation Email to Delphi Participants-Round 3

Dear Prof Law,

My name is Nesrin Sourak, a PhD student at Queen Margaret University Edinburgh under the supervision of Professor Andrew Frew. This is an invitation requesting your participation in the third and final round of a modified Delphi study.

I would like to thank you for your participation in the first and second rounds of the Delphi and these results are now presented to you in this final round for your final evaluation.

As you already know, the purpose of this study is to refine and validate the most recent tool available for the evaluation of the effectiveness of destination based websites. The original aim was to implement this updated framework on the official website of the Syrian Tourism Ministry, unfortunately, due to the instability of the security situation in Syria, my home country, and consequent lack of tourist traffic it has been decided to test the new updated framework on another destination's website. It is hoped that this model can subsequently be applied widely and in due course to the official website of the Syrian tourism ministry when the security situation and tourism improves.

The study will provide a range of detailed advice and suggestions for management actions which should significantly assist and help in improving the selected destination website. I am kindly asking you if you would like to contribute adding to the success of this research through your participation in the final round of this Delphi study by clicking on the following link:

Appendix VII. Round III Questionnaire

Instructions

Thank you very much for your participation in this piece of research. Please note that this is the final round of the Delphi study – the round of the research in which you are participating. The aim of this round is to finalise and validate the portfolio of criteria that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a Destination Management System (DMS). I have compiled the results from the second round and a questionnaire with feedback for each item is presented to you in the third round. You are kindly asked to re-rate your answers for items on which no consensus was obtained in the second round and for which the average score was less than 4. Please note that items on which consensus was obtained were excluded from the questions, in order to save time, to make the questionnaire shorter and to reach the objective of the research.

Note: The average score for each item was calculated according to the outcomes of the second round.

How to re-rate:

Please rate the following components on a scale of 1 (no relevance) to 5 (extremely relevant) by placing a **number** next to the components in the **Rate** column for each of the sections below.

The table below shows the rating scale:

Number	Scale
1	No Relevance
2	Quite Relevant
3	Relevant
4	Very Relevant
5	Extremely Relevant

1. Please rate the components that you consider to be most relevant for inclusion in a definition of a DMS.

A Definition of a Destination Management Systems (DMS) should:	Average Score	Rate
Expand the variety of products on offer.	3.5	
Include an explanation of how the DMS maintains and distributes data.	3.4	
Include the term 'inter-organisational systems'.	3.4	
Include some requirement on the quality of the content supplied by searching services.	3.7	
Include the term 'an integral component of the destination marketing strategy'.	3.8	
Include the term 'an effective DMS is a critical part of the customer journey towards identifying, selecting and visiting a destination'.	3.8	

2. There were some new suggestions that have been proposed by the participants in the second round about the components of a DMS definition. Please rate these components and give your comments where applicable.

A Definition of a Destination Management Systems (DMS) should:	Rate	Comments
'It should include social networking with perspective in the communication/distribution to customers.'		
'The DMS should also support tourists during the all phases of consumption: mobility and post consumption (re-experiencing + double-way connection with social media).'		
'A DMS should be a tool helping to create unique destination products by teaming the suppliers of the region'		

3. Please rate the components that you consider to be most relevant for the aims of a DMS.

Proposed Aims of a DMS.	Average Score	Rate
Cover costs.	3	
Enable tourism firms in tourism destination governance.	3.8	
Support the collection of tourism satellite accounts.	3.4	
Provide something on ROI.	3.6	

4. There were some new suggestions that have been proposed by the participants in the second round about the aims of a DMS definition. Please rate these components and give your comments where applicable.

Proposed Aims of a DMS.	Rate	Comments
'If we consider a Communication Oriented Model the message published on a DMS website should change according to the sender and receiver of the communication. In other words I would suggest that internal communication (within the organisation) and external communication (for stakeholder and tourists) should be considered as different communication acts'.		
'Transaction function will depend on visitors' perception'.		
Destination marketing and Product marketing.		

5. Please rate the components that you consider to be most relevant when evaluating the effectiveness of a Destination Website.

Areas Required to Evaluate Effectiveness.	Average Score	Rate
Conversion rates	3.9	
Tourism governance	3.6	
ROI	3.5	
Commerce	3.7	
Value of trip	3.7	
Visitor expenditure	3.6	

6. There were some new suggestions that have been proposed by the participants in the second round about areas required to evaluate effectiveness. Please rate these components and give your comments where applicable.

Areas Required to Evaluate Effectiveness.	Rate	Comments
'Assistance in every stage of the tourism goods consumption. Tourism and Social media are given for granted. Also long tail approach (i.e. consider niche tourism) with specific websites could be of interest. I would say target segmentation'.		
Identify weaknesses in the website.		
Dimensions can be defined based on user needs.		

7. Please rate the criteria that you consider to be most relevant when evaluating the effectiveness of a Destination website.

Promotion Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Click-through %	3.9	
Reduce perception gap	3.6	

Content Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Stickiness	3.6	
Focus	3.9	
Percentage of supplier participation	3.9	
Product comparison	3.8	
Range of content providers	3.8	
Content uniqueness	3.8	
Knowledge creation	3.6	
Slipperiness	3.4	
Value-added features	3.6	

Design & Navigation Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Length of stay	3.7	
Use of graphics	3.8	
Findability	4.0	
Privacy	4.1	
Usability – suppliers' perspective	4.2	
Usability (including navigation)	4.4	
Use of graphics	3.9	
Usefulness	4.0	

Performance Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Seamless	3.9	
Integration with suppliers' systems	4.1	
Interoperability	4.0	
Regional-National integration	4.1	
Reliability	4.2	
Robustness	4.0	
Speed of response	4.2	
Absence of Errors	4.0	

Commerce Criteria (including Revenue Generation)	Average Score	Rate
Cost of sales	3.7	
Cost per contact	3.7	
DMS % of overall sales	3.7	
Dynamic packaging	3.6	
Reservation for non-accommodation	3.8	
Secure transaction	3.9	
Value of sales	3.7	
Value of visitors	3.7	
Average costs of different behaviours	3.6	
Balanced cost of participation	3.5	
Cost per reservation	3.8	
Return on investment	3.4	
Internal returns	3.6	
Transaction cost suppliers	3.7	

Customer-Centric Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Customer recollection	3.7	
Demand forecasting	3.7	
Identify target markets	3.9	
Personalisation	3.7	

Management Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Achievement of DMS aims	3.9	
Added value	3.8	
Barriers to entry-exit	3.5	
Channel integration	3.9	
Depends on DMO aims	3.9	
Internal level of integration	3.7	
No of partners	3.5	
Ownership of inventory	3.4	
Supplier feedback	3.7	
Type of partners	3.5	
Visitors to destination	3.9	

Reach Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Geographical spread	3.7	
Percentage of suppliers getting visits	3.7	
Reach percentage	3.7	
Visitor sessions	3.7	
Volume of hits	3.5	
Volume of visitors - reach	3.9	

Acquisition Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Acquisition	3.6	
Abandonment	3.6	

Retention Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Churn	3.5	
Retention	3.7	

Conversion Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Attrition	3.5	
Conversion change percentage	3.6	
New registrations	3.9	
No of logins	3.8	
No of registered users	3.8	
Offline conversion	3.5	
Online conversion	3.9	
Total conversion	3.9	
No. of emails volunteered	3.7	

Loyalty Criteria	Average Score	Rate
Frequency	3.8	
Loyalty	3.8	
Volume of revisits	3.9	

Respondent Profile

8. What is your name?*
9. What is your email address?*
10. What is your country of birth?
11. To what industry category do you belong? *

12. Please tick your knowledge level of website effectiveness and destination website measurement in the table below: *

	Rank
Unfamiliar	
Casually acquainted	
Competent	
Advanced	
Expert	

Guidelines:

Unfamiliar	You consider yourself unfamiliar with the topic area.
Casually acquainted	You have read or heard about the topic in the media or other popular presentations.
Competent	You feel you have a proficient level of knowledge about the topic. You have read about the topic and formed some opinions about it.
Advanced	You were once an expert but feel somewhat rusty now, or are in the process of becoming an expert but still have some way to go to achieve mastery of the topic, or if you work in a neighbouring field and occasionally draw upon or contribute to the development of the topic.
Expert	You consider yourself to belong to the community of people who currently dedicate themselves to the topic matter, and are recognised outside of your organisation as having a strong grasp of trends or other aspects of the topic.

* = Required Fields

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix VIII. Information Sheet for Potential Participants



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

Information Sheet for Potential Participants

My name is Nesrin Sourak and I am a PhD candidate from the School of Arts, Social Science and Management at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. I am undertaking a research project for my PhD thesis. The title of my project is: Destination websites evaluation in the tourism industry

This study is looking into the approaches that used in tourism industry for evaluating the effectiveness of destination websites. I would like to interview destination managers and people who are responsible for managing their destination websites to ask questions related directly to the main aim of my research.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in the interviews. The researcher is not aware of any risks associated with the project. The whole procedure should take no longer than 15 minutes. You will be free to withdraw from the study at any stage and you would not have to give a reason.

The results may be published in a journal or presented at a conference

Contact details of the researcher:

Name of researcher: Nesrin Sourak
PhD candidate
School of Arts, Social Science and Management

Address: Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh
Queen Margaret University Drive
Musselburgh
East Lothian EH21 6UU

Email / Telephone: nsourak@qmu.ac.uk / 0131 474 0000

Appendix IX. Interviews

Interview 1

Interviewer: what forms does the online presence take?

Respondent: As I said, we only look after the domestic market from a marketing perspective. The online element of that would be obviously a website and then all social media channels. So we would have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest, etc.

Interviewer: What's the purpose for each one, for Facebook and Instagram?

Respondent: They're all about encouraging people to take more holidays in Ireland, so, for people to stay here on holiday more. It's a combination of inspiration and informing. We find for a lot of people because it's a domestic, they know the areas, but a lot of what they don't know is- they don't know there's so much to do. We've very much done a programme of events, so we're highlighting that there's so much on and there are reasons to stay here as opposed to reasons to leave Ireland.

Interviewer: What type of market or the audience you are trying for each?

Respondent: Well, it's just domestic, it's purely domestic but it's obviously a very large segment in the sense that you're trying to attract everyone. So there is your younger segment, your families and your older segment.

We've actually just literally re-segmented our markets so we're going to changing our website. We've identified that there are about seven segments, but we've identified about three that we're actually going to go after in much more detail.

Interviewer: What target do you do with the web presence, booking, downloading, visiting, what target do you have?

Respondent: In Ireland we've no booking. Basically we're a government agency and this is the same for our overseas sites as well. We're a government agency, fully funded, we're not like any other destinations where they're [membership 0:01:49] based. Therefore it's against EU law for us to have a booking engine because then we're seen as anticompetitive. So we have no booking facility.

What we do is we facilitate bookings so each business is allowed to pick two to three booking engines they would like to be with it. It could be their own or Expedia or whoever they want and the visitor to the site can book through that.

Interviewer: How do you promote the web presence?

Respondent: We've brought in our above the line campaign and online. We would have a full scale TV, radio, press campaign but the core attention would be our website. Similarly we would do normal online advertising with SEO, PANA advertising, social media advertising, mobile advertising etc.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the website?

Respondent: We would do an awful lot of analytics. Google but we also adapt other analytics in there as well, and we would also analyse our social media. We take it very much at 360 degrees, so we look at our whole campaign to see where-, "So if we've been active here has that had a knock on effect online or not?" So where we see the peaks and troughs, we very much analyse-

Interviewer: from which perspective do you evaluate ?

Respondent: We- two fold in the sense that we don't own the sale - we don't own the full sales channel so we can't measure it based on sales because we don't have that ability. We base it on the number of referrals that we send out to businesses, that's how we track the business side of things, but mainly it's on a consumer side. So how many, how much of the market is interested or the visiting etc., etc?.

Interviewer: What criteria do you use when you evaluate the website effectiveness,

Respondent: We base - that's where you probably need to talk to somebody else. We have set ourselves a whole pile of great goals by channel; I just can't remember them all, but I can send them to you. It's about customer, visitors, duration time, bounce rates and that as well.

Interviewer: How many criteria?

Respondent: I think we have between about six or ten criteria.

Interviewer: Who put these criteria...?

Respondent: We would have worked it together with our overall strategy and our media agencies etc., as well. But we have different criteria per channel because they have different objectives.

Interviewer: Who does the evaluation across this market, technical marketer base?

Respondent: It's marketing, for marketing.

Interviewer: The marketing team?

Respondent: Yes, we would do it but we would also independently evaluate all of our media buying to our online media buying, is it giving us the return as well? We've got external tracking in place as well to see the effectiveness of that.

Interviewer: When do you evaluate, what do you do with the result, ...?

Respondent: It's like a continuous circle in the sense that it feeds back into everything that we do. We would do bi-weekly and monthly reports and then it feeds back into every activity that we do, so we're constantly evolving.

Interviewer: Are aware of any commonly used or industry standard method of evaluation?

Respondent: Not standard and we have looked at different industries to develop what's a benchmark of etc., or bounce rates etc. of that. So we do- so similarly in and also we would do regular research with just normal standard research and then we do different ways of it. We benchmark against ourselves and then we look at industry notes, where they are as well on those.

Interviewer: So you share or you learn from other destinations?

Respondent: Less destinations, more similar industries. it is very hard to get other destination information.

Interviewer: Are there any factors that influence the approach you take when evaluate the effectiveness of the web presence?

Respondent: We always look at the cost per sale even though we don't have a cost per sale. So yes, there is return on investment, there is a cost. We look and see okay, "We're spending X and this hasn't generated enough click throughs, etc., etc."

Yes, we would look at it from a cost perspective as well as an effectiveness perspective in the sense that- and there's also stuff that we do that may not necessarily be cost wise but there's another political agenda or another wider agenda.

Interviewer: Do you use evaluation software for effectiveness, to evaluate effectiveness?

Respondent: Yes, it would be included in our general analysis and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Can you please give me an example for the software?

Respondent: I don't know because I don't do that sorry, I have someone in my team do this.

Interviewer: Who's that?

Respondent: Yes, they do it in my team; I just don't know what we use, sorry.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example in your opinion for good practice, for destination website? Do you think it's good practice, and why you think it's a good practice?

Respondent: I don't know if it's good practice, I know that we look at others and see what they're doing, if you know what I mean.

Respondent: I think Iceland is quite good, I think Australia are very, very good.

Interviewer: Iceland, Australia.

Respondent: Yes, however we're looking at Berlin at the moment because we're looking at a Dublin perspective and a city.

Respondent: We're looking at them via, we're very much customer segment based. "So this is the segment we're going after, who else are we competing against and how are they doing it and how are they pitching it?"

Respondent: Yes, but as I say we look at the customer segment we're going after. So if I take Dublin, there's a segment we've identified, we've identified say Berlin would be in our competitive set. That's where they're good as well and they're doing quite a good job at targeting that segment. We're trying to say; "Okay, how are you doing it digitally?" and then we would look to hear from them.

Interviewer: Thanks very much.

Respondent: No problem at all.

Interview 2

Respondent: Okay, so we have one large web platform, but we use different URLs depending on where the audience is coming from.

We can IP target customers, so if you are coming from the UK you might get visitmelbourne.com, because you don't know what Victoria is – you know Melbourne, but if you're a domestic visitor, Victoria is the state, it's not just Melbourne.

So we used Victoria, there are different URLs, the same site but different landing pages. So imagine an octopus with many arms, you just arrive at a different page on the site with a different URL, but it's the same site.

The content on visitmelbourne is focused towards an international audience and the content on visitvictoria.com is focussed to a domestic audience.

so we can target where you're coming from and provide content that changes based on where you are, because our website is not page based but object based.

So if you are coming from the UK, you might see a content, a deal – if we are running a deal with Singapore Air, that's specific for the UK market, but if you are coming from the US, you wouldn't see that deal because it's not relevant to you. You might see another deal or no deal.

In the same way, we prioritise content. There is something in Melbourne called the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Now the MCG, that is known by English people because they love cricket and it's a famous cricketing venue like Lord's in England if you like cricket. Whereas in the US they have no idea, the USA has no idea what cricket is and so this piece of content on visitmelbourne is relevant to the UK market, but it's less interesting to the US market, so they might not see that content – same page, different content.

So when you say which types of market, the site changes depending on the market.

Interviewer: Thank you,

Respondent: we have people within intra Australia, so we have three types of marketing – regional marketing, intra state marketing within the state, so interstate marketing between ourselves and Sydney and Brisbane and Canberra and Perth. So we are trying to attract people from those destinations and international marketing which are people from outside Australia.

When you are talking about outside Australia, our key markets are China – we get more visitors from China than any other country in the world and they spend more money. We have a separate Chinese website which is over 500 pages built on the same platform, so you can flick between Chinese and English language websites.

Other key markets for us are New Zealand, USA, UK, Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Hong Kong is a, sort of, market, Singapore, Korea – those are some of our key markets.

Interviewer: So what forms does your online business take?

Respondent: How do you mean, sort of?

Interviewer: I mean Facebook, Twitter, web, only web...

Respondent: No, no, we have a social, we have a conventional web presence which also a mobile version of our website. If you use a mobile device, you'll get a mobile version of it, but we also worked, so we do web, mobile and social.

Respondent: Okay, well the web generally is for people using desktops, from around the world and the purpose is it's adaptive to change to the customer's needs.

The mobile automatically detects the fact you are using a mobile phone and delivers mobile versions of the site. The mobile, it's not a responsive design, it's a design for mobiles. If you are coming from the UK and you are looking at your phone, our site will look one way and if you are in Melbourne you will see another way, because you are in the destination already and it has what's nearby, functionality integrated with the website.

In terms of social media, we are very active on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest - all of the usual suspects.

Interviewer: How would you promote your website?

Respondent: Well I guess our marketing depends on the market.

So nationally we do campaigns that we do intrastate campaigns, national campaigns and international campaigns and they vary based on budget and market. So some of our national campaigns might have anything from television ads, to print, to social, to cinema, to mobile, to anything.

International campaigns, we tend to not have enough money to do big brand campaigns, but we did one in China for instance, which had a television ad. It wasn't shown on television but it was shown in taxis, in lifts and things like that.

There are many other executions that are typical and there'd be apps, mobile apps and there would be social media components and competitions and the usual thing that you get with all the social media, and campaign.

Interviewer: Thank you. I want to ask you please about website evaluation, how do you monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of the website?

Respondent: We use, it's sort of the other way around – we certainly measure the traffic to the website and the traffic to individual pieces of content by market, by location.

What's more important is we measure the performance of campaigns and one of the KPIs is traffic to the website based on that campaign.

So, it's a bit in reverse, but the website exists to serve the campaign and the purpose, not the other way around.

So we certainly do search engine marketing, obviously, but usually it's more around the campaign model, so we use a lot of organic search rather and content. We spend a lot of money on content and we optimise that content to search and that drives a lot of traffic.

Interviewer: Could you please explain that to me how maybe criteria or dimensions you use to evaluate the website.

Respondent: We evaluate the campaigns and the performance...

Interviewer: Yes, what criteria are you using?

Respondent: Oh, it's like hundreds – it would take me ages. Look, it depends on the campaign. It depends on the purposes of the campaign. If the purposes of the campaign is to send people to the website, then we can evaluate that, but often the types of KPIs will be social engagement, number of visitors to websites, number of times spent on site...

Interviewer: Can I ask you, sorry I interrupted you, how did you arrive at these hundreds of criteria as you said, a lot?

Respondent: I don't know we've been doing it for ten years – decades, so it just builds. So we didn't wake up one morning and decide we wanted to do it, we've had a consumer website for 15 years and so it's building every year on that knowledge we have in the past.

Interviewer: This is from the consumer perspective?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: You don't take other stakeholders, I mean suppliers into consideration when you evaluate the effectiveness of the website?

Respondent: We evaluate the effectiveness of our digital strategy – the website is one component. Out of context it means nothing

Websites are not standalone things, they exist for a purpose. It's the purpose we measure. How many visitors are we getting, how long do they spend, how long they stay? Did they use a website as part of...?

We don't do consumer active, consumer testing of our website, we use Google analytics to analyse the performance of our website.

We don't put surveys in front of people – it interferes with their experience, but we analyse where they go on the site, what content they look at the site and how they use the site.

Interviewer: Why don't you ask the customer?

Respondent: Because it interferes with their experience and it's not, we don't like to interfere with the customer experience.

If they want to provide us feedback they can, but we don't like to survey people who are there for another purpose.

They might not come to our state; they might be annoyed by that. I know that sounds unusual.

We survey customers in other ways that are less intrusive, but we get tremendous amounts of data on their actual behaviour.

So if you ask a consumer, “Do you like this?” they might say, “Yes” but then they don't buy it, you see if they buy it.

Interviewer: Ok. Thank you

Respondent: I don't know. So we will observe their actual behaviour on the website and we watch it over time.

Interviewer: Using analytic software?.

Respondent: Using Google analytics, and other things, other tools. We benchmark ourselves against other states and yes.

Interviewer: So what, kind of, software do you use?

Respondent: Google analytics, we've also used the Hipwise comparison tools in the past too.

Interviewer: How often do you do that evaluation?

Respondent: Every day, but it's not about the whole website. It's about individual pieces of content, how they perform, how does content perform on a website?

So periodically, probably every three to five years we review the design of the website and see if that's working for consumers, but we spend \$300,000 a year altering the site and making it better.

Interviewer: So it is an influence affecting your evaluation of process, the cost?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. So we observe what people's behaviour are, we also look at best practice and see where we stand compared to the best websites and we modify the site in line with best practice. A good example is last year we completed a mobile version of the website. We could see the amount of mobile traffic we were getting to the website...

Interviewer: So if I ask who does the evaluation?

Respondent: We don't have a form; we don't sit down and evaluate the website.

Marketing experts, we always are evaluating the content performance. The website is the means of delivery and so sometimes that's about changing the design, but it's complex.

We have a very, highly complicated, sophisticated system, very expensive to implement, but we monitored the performance of content all the time.

We don't just build a website, leave it for two years and in two years come back and do an evaluation. No – it's every day we evaluate the performance of the content.

Right, so we completed a redevelopment in July 2011 and we launched it and then we have every day the people working on the website are looking to increase the performance of that website, based on the analytics tool and the performance of the content and the optimisation within search engines.

Interviewer: What do they do with the result of the evaluation, how do you improve?

Respondent: Okay, the contents writers, they write a piece of content, they see how that content works to people, what happens with that content.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example, how do they benefit from the result in content?

Respondent: Okay, so somebody, a piece of content might be a campaign, it might be a deal with an airline. They can see how many clicked on the deal.

Interviewer: If they saw not many people clicked on, what do they do?

Respondent: It goes into a change, a behaviour change.

Interviewer: Do the marketing campaign?

Respondent: They are the marketing people doing it, yes. It feeds back around.

Interviewer: Can you give me examples for best or good practice you think,

Respondent: Well visitswitzerland I think is a strong type. There is a site I looked at recently I thought was very cool, where was it? Ontario – it's really cool, very cartoon like, quite engaging. I think it's a very, very difficult question to answer.

Interviewer: Good practice.

Respondent: There is usually a weighting, it's usually it's what you like. Demetrius has these function boxes you check. The reality is there is no best, there is just...It's a bit like branding – let's just take this as an example. You've often got a battle between branding and utility information. The more information say, you might put on a page, the branding starts to suffer because it's like a competition of the two. So if you are a marketing person that believes in this power of brand, often you are diminishing the amount of content on the website because, for the sake of argument, because the brand needs to stand out or the images need to stand out.

So most websites these days are using a lot of imagery and almost less content, because their priorities are around the brand messaging that goes with the imagery and the belief that the use of imagery will engage emotionally with the traveller.

The trouble is a traveller will visit your site many times I believe, during the travel journey. Okay, they'll do planning, they might in the beginning do awareness, they'll do planning and now they do it while they are travelling, on mobile devices, and then afterwards they might use it.

The problem with a website is that you can't make everyone happy on that journey. Some websites focus on their awareness stuff, some focus on the planning stuff, some people like itinerary builders, some people want to maximise integration of social media.

Other people believe that there should not be much information and more portal-like. Other people believe there should be Wikipedia like bits of information and they are all right for one particular type of consumer.

A classic example is an itinerary builder – people are always building them, but they are only used by about 5% of the population and most of the people who build it use them.

Time and time again you see itinerary builders being built and not being used, because people believe that's what consumers want. They, kind of, want that, but they don't – they don't actually use it.

They want to be told things, but they often want to have creative content that suits their particular needs. It's not the same thing as an itinerary builder. Sorry we are running out of time.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Respondent: I've probably haven't answered all your...

Interview 3

Interviewer: What forms does the online presence take?

Respondent: In our case, we got our national destination portal, this basically has got a B2B, so consumer facing sites. Then we've got the B2B, professional sites and media related sites.

Then we are present on the social media channels. Purposely also as the final strategy, we are focusing on the selected social media channels. Would you like me to specify?

Interviewer: Yes please.

Respondent: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Four Square, as well. Those are the primary ones.

Interviewer: So what is the purpose of each one?

Respondent: The purpose of the portal is establishing the joint digital presence and promotion for the Slovenian travel offer and services. One is also because we also got integrated approaches, basically to enable customers to buy selected travel services. That one is communicating and engaging also, because we've got some integration with the social media communication with our final audiences.

Obviously, what I just mentioned now is for the consumer side. Would you like me to specify for the others, as well? Or are you looking more to the side facing the customers?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: We are also using, basically, the same platform and also other social media platforms for the research purposes, as well.

For the social media channels we are basically having just to enhance, to raise awareness about a brand, about the country, about the services. Then, to engage, to communicate with our audiences. Also, to listen to them, to basically get inside what actually they want, what they are looking for, what they may miss. So it's also a very valuable source of research, as I mentioned before. Also, as additional support with the other digital channels in terms of combining our online activities to reach our customers at different stages of the online journey.

You mentioned at the beginning what other online presence, I don't know whether you are considering the email marketing, also as one of the forums? We are also running email marketing, as such. Obviously, other forms of digital marketing activities, this is also part of

our digital presence, where we are presenting ourselves through either display advertising, then search engine marketing, also a form of our online presence. So, Google Ads, search engine optimisation activities and so on. Mobile; sorry, we are also present, we've got mobile apps.

Interviewer: What is the type of market, or audience you are trying to reach?

Respondent: We are focusing on one hand the Board which is now actually officially called SPIRIT, because you mentioned other agencies. It's actually addressing mainly the international audiences, however also partly the domestic audience. Looking to the international markets, would you like me to specify all the European markets that we are approaching? The most important for us are the host markets that are providing the most value, the most customers to the country, like Germany, Italy, Austria, UK, Benelux countries. Spain, Russia, we can also specify some others. Then, plus Asia as an emerging market.

Interviewer: What targets do you have for the wave presence?

Respondent: Obviously on the one hand they are more general gestures and they are really specified, and we do the same within our social media strategy. So, it goes really from the general to the more specifics. Obviously, on a specific level it would be raising awareness, getting more customers to the site, communicating. Obviously to increase the number of visitors to our site. To increase the number of bookings on our site, then to increase the level of engagement, people engaging with the site. Then, also to provide a platform for the partnerships.

Interviewer: Thank you

Respondent: Well, there are more actually, but I don't know how many. As I said, based on the business goals, we really specify this more into details.

Interviewer: How do you promote your website presence?

Respondent: We promote our website presence through different marketing activities, supported with the offline communications, as well. So basically, every single communication that would go from the organisation would include the digital, or particularly Slovenia.info as the name of the portal presentation. So be it when we are on fares workshops, there will be some press releases going on. Maybe do some physical gadgets, basically everywhere where it is possible.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the website, and for what purposes?

Respondent: We are currently monitoring the effect of the website, so we are using Google Analytics. We will be monitoring all the KPIs; how many we sell, how long, what they are doing. Actually, also what they approach us

We are monitoring how effective our other forms of digital marketing were. For example, search; Google Ads within the search campaigns. for example how many back links you would have.

Interviewer: what particular criteria you use to evaluate the effectiveness?

Respondent: We are also run comparisons study, or benchmark with the other sites and then we would have different criteria in the different groups. For example, we would be looking at different aspects; the user experience on the site, the design part, how certain areas are performing. Some other specifics; how fast is the site. Then, we are also looking on the one hand what is actually provided them, in terms of the quantity, but again, also in terms of the quality to what extent the site is. For example, mature in comparison to competition, for example. Usually we would also run this with external agencies. So we would be having a whole set of criteria. There would be groups so they would select the comparisons. Sometimes we used to get in some international comparison studies, as well, and those studies, they have all got the criteria. I think you can find some of those things online, those benchmarks. If you type in destination benchmarking study, for example, this is what the digital think tank was doing.

Obviously, in the last year, increasingly we're looking more at socially related criteria; mobile, to what extent the site is adjusted for the mobile users, and so on.

Interviewer: How often do you evaluate the website? Do you evaluate it in terms of suppliers, or more consumer perspective?

Respondent: More often on a constant basis. Obviously, this big study is done once per year, but there are constant actual evaluations on the website, especially looking to those factors, within the Google Analytics that I mentioned before. So, this is done on a constant basis and to be honest less on the B2B side. On the B2B side, just every few years.

We would be looking to generally, "What would you improve?" we would ask them and we would mix the pilot groups and then judge the B2B website presence.

Plus, we actually run the surveys with our B2B partners, also related to how satisfied they are, we ask what they would improve. Plus, there is a user link experience analysis, and regular online surveys related to the website, what could be improved. Also, the customers would be asked to evaluate several criteria of the website, “How quick are the pages, what is navigation like?”

Interviewer: What do you do with the results?

Respondent: Some of the results, they are summarised and they are evaluated. This is also what we managed to do in the last years, we try then to link those results. Obviously, the easiest way is to, because it comes back to our operations, we do the improvements. We would get a whole list of possible improvements and then we prioritise them and based on the budget and the time schedule available, we would be working on those improvements in the same year.

Some of the results are really significant for other marketing corporations. So this information would go back to the general marketing. From this kind of study, we would also get some other information that would be useful.

Interviewer: Do you use any analytical approaches?

Respondent: Yes, Google Analytics and we were using Attentics, this is also social media software, and several free available software for the social media measurement and search engine measurement, as well.

The evaluation is done by our research department. So, basically, part of those evaluation is done by the agency, but otherwise, within the research department.

Usually, the evaluators are junior researchers; however the results are then looked at by the senior members. Even by myself, or other heads of departments who are basically interested in the results.

Interviewer: Which factors influence the approach you take when evaluating the website? Are there any factors which influence?

How many of them are doing different ones? Yes, obviously, it's a good point. Costs as well, but costs are to the extent for more those studies that are done every few years and that are more complex and looking to the several factors.

Otherwise, it's actually already like implementing the systematic approach that we implemented, so, in terms of a regular practice. For an organisation that are very in terms of

the budgeting, the costs is definitely one of the factors. I'm just trying to think of something else. I couldn't remember any other factors at the moment, to be honest.

Interviewer: How do you go about updating the effectiveness process?

Respondent: Just perhaps if you realise the business need at the background. For example, if you would realise the particular part of the digital presence, or the portal, is performing not as it should, or is really user friendly, then consequently we might decide for a different approach. Or for more expansion.

Interviewer: How do you go about updating the effectiveness process? Do you update the effectiveness process?

Respondent: Whether we improve it through the time, do you mean?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Yes, because we use developments and technologies. They are new things that we would have on the side that we would be looking at, waiting on the side. The typical example would be the social media parts of the site.

Interviewer: Can you please give me any example of good practice of a destination website? Why is it good?

Respondent: TourismIreland.com definitely. Then, Australia.com. Switzerland, UK, visitbritain.

Interviewer: Why do you think Ireland is good?

Respondent: As far as I know, and also from what we heard from today and I know them from before, obviously a modern approach to our new destination marketing. So, the way they construct information, how they instigate it with the other campaigns that they are running. I think it's quite user friendly. Also, one I like, for example, is visitbritain, as well, that's also one of my favourites, the new one. It's very user friendly, it's very well thought through in terms of architecture and how the flow goes. I also like on both sites, the integration of the consumers to the site.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much. Interview finished. Thank you.

Interview 4

Interviewer What forms of online presence take?

Respondent: Well it's mainly our website that's the core of our and we also have a couple of social media channels that we work on, mainly Facebook, Twitter. We do Instagram, we do Foursquare and yes, that's basically it.

Interviewer: Why do you have this – what are the purposes of having this kind of social media of online presence?

Respondent: With social media it's basically to get in touch with our customers and our future visitors. Well it's a B2C platform for us. Facebook is B2C, Twitter we use for the B2B, as a B2B channel for travel journalists, bloggers and the travel industry. We also have – I forgot to say we have LinkedIn we use for our bureau office uses that a lot. We have a B2C website which is Vienna info, where we focus on the customer, the client. We have a B2B platform as well, the Vienna B2B site which is connected as well. There we communicate with – that's a platform for our B2B partners, so the travel industry in Austria and abroad.

Interviewer: What type of audience are you trying to reach, or market?

Respondent: Well both – markets, well we have defined 28 markets that we work on actively in the Vienna Tourist Board. Our website is in – the B2C website is in languages. So that's not for every market but so – a lot of foreign speaking...

Interviewer: So what's the type of market?

Respondent: The biggest markets are Germany and Austria for Vienna, which hold about 20% of the visitors. The rest is a lot of European countries we are actively working on like France, UK, Italy, Spain, the Eastern European countries like Czech Republic, Slovakia. Russia is a very important market to us. We also have overseas markets that we focus on which are Canada and the United States. We have Japan and we have China and we also work on countries like emerging countries like India, Turkey and Brazil. I hope I didn't forget anything, but it's like a big – we work on many different markets.

Respondent: In 13 languages we have the website.

Interviewer: So for the web presence, what targets do you have?

Respondent: No. Actually it's – our website, our B2B website, is like a travel guide for the guests. It's more an inspirational platform. So we want to make people see what's going on in Vienna and to make a decision to go to – so it's...

Interviewer: Oh so it's more information.

Respondent: Information based, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. How do you promote your online presence?

Respondent: We do a lot of search engine optimisation, a lot of SEA. We promote our website in every channel we have from our business cards, like on the email signature. It's everywhere. On every advertisement that we do, our website is well promoted. So it's very important.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate or monitor the effectiveness?

Respondent: Well we do that all the time. So we look at the numbers of unique users, of page views. We do monthly statistics for our partners and for internal use. We look at what topics are important every month, so what are the search words that people are looking for on the on-site search, as well as on Google. So we do analyse a lot.

Interviewer: So for what main purposes do you do that evaluation?

Respondent: Well we just want to know how we are performing and also put them in perspective with how the number of visitors is going up. We look at how many people use the certain language pages, to see if we are doing well there.

Interviewer: Do you write the criteria that you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the website? Which criteria do you use?

Respondent: one criteria is unique users per month, page views per month, how long they stay on the site, how many people go – jump off the site immediately. These are criteria that we are looking at. Since the numbers are growing really fast it's very positive.

Interviewer: What do you with the result?

Respondent: Well we just look at it and see if we are in the right way and if we are – at the moment it's just going really well so we can't really – well, for example if there were a lot of people jumping off one site or something then we think, "Okay maybe we did something wrong with the search engine optimisation," or we look through the keyboards that we use.

Interviewer: how did you arrive at these criteria that you mentioned?

Respondent: Well I think these are very general criteria anyway, so everybody is looking at the unique user and the page views.

Interviewer: who evaluates the website?

Respondent: No, that's us. Just in our team. The members of our team, yes, of the online team.

Interviewer: Do you have an industry standard for best destination website, let's say?

Respondent: What kind of standard do you mean?

Interviewer: Have you used any standards or industry standards for evaluating the website?

Respondent: I don't know what kind of standards you mean. One standard is the unique user and everything. That is a standard, so that's how we – a lot of people do that in order to compare it to other sites as well. That's what we do.

Interviewer: Do you use any analytical software?

Respondent: Yes we have Google Analytics. That's the main software that we use.

Interviewer: do you share your evaluation with other destination approaches?

Respondent: Well at conferences or something we are quite open about numbers and figures, so we do share it. For example when I do a presentation on our website then I also share the figures with them. Also in Austria we have like older get together twice a year and we do share information there. So we compare each other. So we're in – or like with Austria Info, the Austrian Tourist Board, we are in touch as well. We do share information with them too.

Interviewer: Okay. Which factors influence the approach you take when you evaluate the effectiveness of the website?

Respondent: Cost factor.

Interviewer: Is there any influence...

Respondent: At the moment, for example, we are looking at the effectiveness of our language sites. So we are looking at how much do the – how many people go on these sites. Is it really cost effective and how much do the translations cost? That's what we are looking at right now.

Interviewer: can you please give me any example of best practice for a destination website?

Respondent: Vienna Info.

Respondent: You have to talk to Christian about it. No, I think it's a very good site because we are very successful, the city as well as our – and a lot of people say it's a best practice. But also the Austria Info is a very good website. They are doing quite well. Copenhagen. I haven't looked at it in a while but it always used to be a very good site to get ideas as well. So they are always very much forward. Well they always take trends very quickly and they do put them on the website. So they started with that kind of personalisation much earlier than we did, but I don't know any numbers of them so I don't know if they are very successful with it or not.

They work a lot with video content, which is very good. They had this feature with the locals where you could – they almost took you – like recommendations of local people they had on their website, which was really good, and real people. So very authentic as well. So I did like the Copenhagen website a lot. I think Visit Britain is always very good too. They are always very forward as well. I think they do have a lot of money to invest.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much for your help. The interview is finished.

Respondent: You're welcome.

Interview 5

Interviewer: What form does your online presence take, the online presence of the Norwegian Tourist Board?

Respondent: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, all the major channels. Plus, we have a presence on Trip Advisor, we've got a couple of mobile apps. We have a responsive designed site, so it also works on mobile. I think we were the first Tourist Board in Europe to have that, because we launched it two years ago. So we were really the first.

Interviewer: What purpose is it to have this kind of presence online?

Respondent: I think it's a matter of our role, and that one of our roles is to do the marketing. These days, that would be in the digital space, because that's where you meet the most consumers. So that's basically it. You have to be where the consumers are.

Interviewer: What type of market are you trying to reach?

Respondent: Our main markets are Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Plus, we have some more markets, like US, Spain, Italy, Russia, Poland and of course, China. We are also opening up the Brazilian market now, this year.

Interviewer: What targets do you have from your web presence?

Respondent: It has several targets.

Respondent: Of course visits; it's important to reach as many people as you want to with your message. I think a lot of people are saying, "It doesn't matter how many visits you have", I disagree with that. From a marketing perspective, you want to be able to reach as many of your potential customers as possible with your marketing message. So that's one target, KPI. It's not the only important one, we also measure referrals to the industry, and we also incorporate with a booking engine, so we can see how many bookings we generate, and the revenue from that.

We also measure the customer satisfaction with the website. We also measure how the website actually pushes people a bit further down the funnel. So we can see how we are actually influencing their desire to go to Norway. So we measure different things.

Interviewer: How do you promote your web presence?

Respondent: In every possible way. They all do that, we use, of course, social media, search engines, newsletters, print boards, mobile ads, whatever.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your web presence? How do you monitor the effectiveness?

Respondent: we measure how it impacts the view on Norway and desires to go to Norway. We measure, of course, referrals and that stuff.

Interviewer: what purposes of your evaluation of the effectiveness of your website?

Respondent: Why do we evaluate? Yes, we do really need to report on what effectiveness we have, because our stakeholders and funders and owners are constantly asking us, “What’s the effect on your campaigns”, and, “What’s the effect on your website?” So, that’s why.

Of course, we also are eager to find out, “Does this make sense to do this?” because all these things are very labour intensive.

Interviewer: What criteria do you use to evaluate the effectiveness of the website?

Respondent: you have lots of traffic to one page, but all people do on that page is read, they don’t do anything else. On some pages that’s natural, because it’s a page people go to, to get information, and that’s it. On other pages, you want the tourist to do something, click a link, or order something or download something, then it’s not okay if all they do is read.

So that’s one of the things we are measuring. It’s user behaviour on the site, on the page level. With the hundreds of thousands of pages, that’s an impossible task to do, but we try our best to measure some key pages.

Interviewer: Do you evaluate to stakeholders viewpoint, or opinion?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you take that into consideration when you evaluate your destination website?

Respondent: Yes, sometimes, but our number one customer is the tourist.

Interviewer: Okay, from a customer perspective? How often do you evaluate the website?

Respondent: It’s different; sometimes we do many tests, so the split tests and AB tests. If we are unsure of what we should call a menu item, for instance, we do testing. We do user tests and we have regular user feedback. We had user feedback from customers last week.

Interviewer: So you do online surveys?

Respondent: Yes, as well as user testing in the studio with a camera, we also do that.

Interviewer: What do you do with the results?

Respondent: We try to figure out how to improve constantly.

Interviewer: Have you used any automated software, or analytic software to analyse the website?

Respondent: Yes, we have used different tools to measure.

Interviewer: Could you give me one name of software you use?

Respondent: we are using the Visual Website Optimiser Software. For feedback from customers and service, we are using Choral, and we have also been using the Press Pack. We also use this tool for action packing, I can't remember the name of the software, we have actually two of those. Of course, we use Google Analytics and we also use the web counts. So we have that set of tools that we use to measure everything that has been done on the site.

Interviewer: Who does the evaluation process?

Respondent: Me and my editor and our technical are responsible for that.

Interviewer: Is there any factor influence of the evaluation process?

Respondent: Often external factors. So somebody wants us to find something out, like, "Why is this page not giving the results we want?" Or, "What do our customers think about this and that?" Or we are getting a new feature and we have to have a serial date benchmark. So it's a different set of reasons, actually.

Interviewer: Do you use any industry standard, method of evaluation?

Respondent: I don't know if there is.

Interviewer: Do you think of any best, or good, standard for destination website evaluations?

Respondent: Well, you have the regular user testing, which is a task given to seven or eight in your target group, and you give them a set of tasks they are to complete to see if they are able to do it, or fail. That's basically a normal way of doing it, at least in Norway and the Nordics. I don't know any other industry standards, actually.

Interviewer: How do you learn about other destinations, when they evaluation the effectiveness of their website presence? Do you learn from others?

Respondent: Yes, I learned a bit actually, from Ireland. I think they have done a good job there. So it's basically like meeting them personally, calling them, meeting them via conferences, networks, personal.

Respondent: I think many of our European colleagues are a bit ahead of us on the metrics and the KPIs and the whole measurement, actually. Basically, because I think they are ahead of us in terms of seeing how important the web base in the holistic perspective for the business. They see that's one of their absolutely biggest assets, whilst my country, we see it as a very important tool, but it's only a tool and it's not a goal itself. Our organisation is more focused on destination management, and the product development. Also, on the financial side of funding, start ups, so we have a very broad perspective and in that sense, the web is only one of many important things.

Interviewer: Thanks very much, for your help.. Interview finished.

Appendix X. Online Questionnaire

Dear participants,

Thank you very much for agreeing to fill out my survey, conducted as part of my Ph.D. research at Queen Margaret University in Scotland. The survey is intended to investigate the effectiveness of destination websites. Please note that all information regarding each participant's destination website will be strictly confidential and anonymous. If you have any questions regarding the survey or would like to contact me please feel free to do so at nsourak@qmu.ac.uk.

Nesrin Sourak

PhD Candidate at Queen Margaret University

School of Arts, Social Sciences and Management

Queen Margaret University Drive

Edinburgh

EH21 6UU

UK

A. Which of these forms part of your online presence? Please tick all that apply to your destination website.

- ☐ Designed website
- ☐ Designed website with different URLs
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Flickr
- ☐ Pintrest
- ☐ Four square
- ☐ Mobile apps
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Email marketing
- ☐ Trip Adviser
- ☐ B2B Platforms

Other, Please specify

B. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your destination wesbite?

- ☐ Online customer surveys
- ☐ Web analytics
- ☐ Online experiments
- ☐ Laboratory testing
- ☐ Best practice comparison
- ☐ Social media analysis

Other, Please specify

C. When you assess the effectiveness of your destination websites, what evaluation criteria do you use?

- ☐ Web Content
- ☐ Web design
- ☐ Web Navigation
- ☐ Web Commerce
- ☐ Web Performance
- ☐ Web Conversion
- ☐ Web Reach
- ☐ Web Management
- ☐ Web Acquisition
- ☐ Web Promotion
- ☐ Web Loyalty
- ☐ Web Retention
- ☐ Web Visibility
- ☐ Web Usability
- ☐ Web Persuasiveness
- ☐ Amount of Visitors
- ☐ Customer satisfaction
- ☐ Marketing aspects
- ☐ Sustainability issue
- ☐ Tourism Governance
- ☐ Collaboration Issues
- ☐ Return on investment (ROI)
- ☐ Value of Trip
- ☐ Visitor Expenditure
- ☐ Goals of the Website
- ☐ Communication with Visitor
- ☐ Small tourism providers
- ☐ Social networking with perspective in communication/distribution to customers
- ☐ Mobility
- ☐ Post-consumption (re-experiencing)

Other, Please specify

D. Please which evaluation criteria are decided/influenced by which group or business areas.

Criteria/ Team	Media agencies	Marketing team	External tracking	Research department	Technical team	Senior members	Heads of department	Other, Please Specify
Web Content								
Web Design								
Web Navigation								
Web Commerce								
Web Performance								
Web Conversion								
Web Reach								
Web Management								
Web Acquisition								
Web Promotion								
Web Loyalty								
Web Retention								
Web Visibility								
Web Usability								
Web Persuasiveness								
Amount of Visitors								
Customer Satisfaction								
Marketing aspects								
Sustainability issue								
Tourism Governance								
Collaboration Issues								
Return on Investment (ROI)								
Value of Trip								
Visitor Expenditure								
Goals of the Website								
Communication with Visitors								
Small Tourism Providers								
Social networking with perspective in communication/distribution to customers								
Mobility								
post-consumption (re-experiencing								

E. Which factors do influence the evaluation process?

- ☐ External factors
- ☐ Implementing a systematic approach
- ☐ Budgeting
- ☐ Return on investment
- ☐ Political agenda

F. How often do you evaluate the effectiveness of your destination website?

- ☐ More than 5 years
- ☐ 1-4 years
- ☐ Every year
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Every day

Other, please specify

G. What approach do you take to learn about good practice of destination websites?

- ☐ Meeting them personally
- ☐ Calling them
- ☐ Conference meetings
- ☐ Networks
- ☐ Personal contact
- ☐ Sharing information

Other, please specify

H. What are the goals of your destination website? Please respond using a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the strongest emphasis.

Purpose/ Scale	1	2	3	4	5
Promotion and Marketing					
Communication and engagement with customers					
Selling travel services					
Research purposes (establishing audience needs)					
Customer support					
Encouraging people to take more holidays in your destination					
Inspiration					
Information					
Destination management					
Product development					

Other, Please specify

I. What types of market are you trying to reach? Please respond using a scale of 1- 5 with 5 being the strongest emphasis

Market type/scale	1	2	3	4	5
National					
Regional					
Local					

Other, Please specify

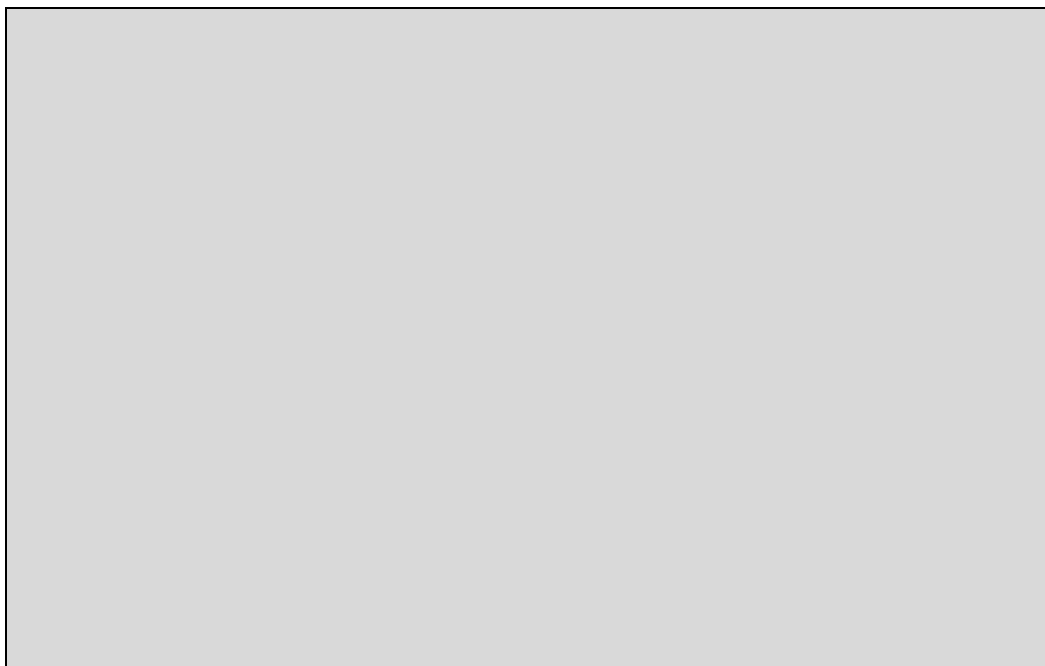
J. How do you promote your destination website? Please respond using a scale of 1 –5 with 5 being the strongest emphasis

Method/Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Search engine optimization										
Advertisement										
Depends on the target market										
National and international campaigns										
Television ads										
Print boards										
Social media										
Cinema										
Mobile ads										
Transport ads										
Lifts										
Press										
Offline communication										
PANA advertising										

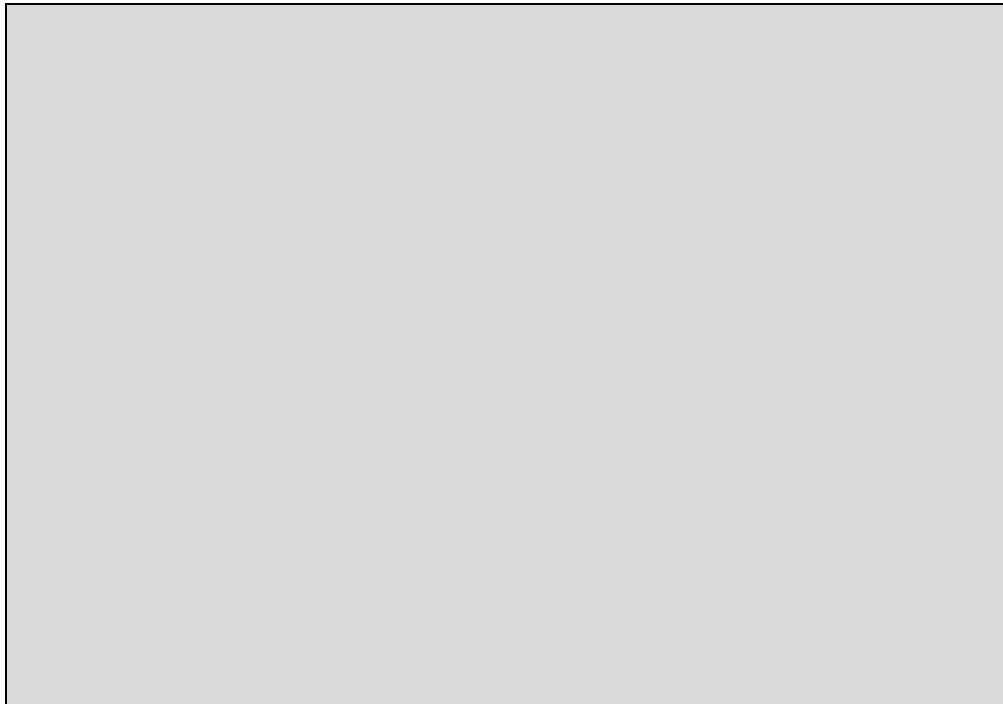
K. Why do you evaluate the effectiveness of your destination website?



L. What do you do with results of evaluation?



M. How often do about update the effectiveness of the evaluation process?



N. What is the URL title of your destination website? Please specify



O.What is your role in the organization? Please specify your role in your responsibility



Thank you

Survey finished

Appendix XI. Management Survey Free Text Comments

This section contains all comments that were included in the 46 manager surveys that were completed from January and March 2014.

What do you do with results of evaluation? (Answered: 46, Skipped: 0)

- M 1. Group Meetings meeting to review the amendments.
- M 2. We discuss them internally, prioritize actions, update and measure the results of these updates.
- M 3. To fine tune content and site navigation.
- M 4. Improving website.
- M 5. Analyse with senior staff and take Action where required.
- M 6. Rapport en interne.
- M 7. Discuss in meetings and find ways to improve.
- M 8. We take the results of the evaluation, see where we are doing well and where we might be lagging and then put our heads Together and see what we can do to better then website to gain more attention.
- M 9. Make amendments to future campaigns.
- M 10. We have room for improvement.
- M 11. We have an insight of what we are doing well and, in so doing, it gives us a further confidence to move ahead and improve our Web sites.
- M 12. Build marketing campaigns around the most searched topics. Look at flow of how people plan their trips and navigate across the Website and find ways to make it easier.
- M 13. Implement in the website.
- M 14. Optimize platform and content.
- M 15. We adapt the content and interaction accordingly
- M 16. Use them to identify areas for improvement and then implement Present top line data and trends to team members Present to cabinet members Benchmark against other destination sites.
- M 17. Learn how to improve our activity.
- M 18. Use them to see which areas we can improve.
- M 19. Add them to our research page and annual report and use them to improve our site.
- M 20. Look at ways to improve future website developments.
- M 21. Develop our online marketing communication.

- M 22. We make decisions about future programs/campaigns based on results of previous campaigns and best practices.
- M 23. Try to improve the existent website and learn more for the new one we which to produce.
- M 24. It informs our future activity.
- M 25. We use results to compare on previous evaluation to see if we have improved but we also use them so we can see where we need to improve.
- M 26. Report to senior management and board. Use them to influence development.
- M 27. Meet, discuss, evaluate options, create a plan to modify web if necessary.
- M 28. Feed it into our website development plan for continual improvement.
- M 29. We try to improve our website as a communication channel.
- M 30. Agency reviews with the client, shares with the industry and uses to make improvements.
- M 31. Report back to the board make changes tweaks as necessary Use to develop the site further.
- M 32. Pass on to the people that need to know and use the information to make the website better.
- M 33. Discuss, use it for A & B testings, refocus or redirect strategy.
- M 34. Changing and add some contents, looking for new technology.
- M 35. Reflect and implement.
- M 36. This is summarized and presented to the board on a monthly basis. With is later shared and discussed with the regional director every 6 months.
- M 37. Use it for internal reporting to have an foundation for future improvements
- M 38. Try to change the content to see what works best.
- M 39. Reports are written and then used to show the need for improvements
- M 40. Adjustments to our current and future campaigns- restructure web page content creation of specialized landing pages.
- M 41. Review with marketing team.
- M 42. Create new strategies for tourism promotion and product development provides information to Members of municipal council (demonstrating the economic impact of tourism based activities).
- M 43. Use for improvement.
- M 44. Use conclusions to transform them into action plan.
- M 45. Analysis, corrections, improvement.
- M 46. Change strategies.

Why do you evaluate the effectiveness of your destination website? (Answered: 46, Skipped: 0)

- M 1. Because I want my website more efficient and Marketing Kaohsiung.
- M 2. Because we realize how the internet is very important in shaping the travel decision, and our site plays an important role in our efforts to convince potential travelers to choose Jordan
- M 3. Average page per visit.
- M 4. To avoid expensive mistakes.
- M 5. To improve.
- M 6. Le site internet est devenu l'outil de communication principal. Il faut pouvoir réagir vite si la fréquentation de celui-ci commence à baisser.
- M 7. To attract more visitor.
- M 8. To ensure that the customer is getting the information they need to entice them to come and visit our island. Another reason we evaluate the effectiveness of our destination website is to ensure the information we are providing is correct so that there is no miscommunication or misunderstandings as to what our visitors are to expect upon arrival to our island. Another major reason to evaluate the effectiveness of our destination website is to help better promote our small island nation. The best way to get people to know more about our island is to encourage them to try something new, visit some place they have never been before. Picture the website as the hook and line and we are using it to try and encourage more people to come to our island, not only because of its beauty but because we are unique.
- M 9. Cross check media strategy.
- M 10. To measure efforts successes or failures. To identify interests.
- M 11. We evaluate the effectiveness of our web site because the good evaluation illustrates the current level of user friendliness and search engine friendliness of our website.
- M 12. We need to know if the information we are putting out there is inspiring and helping people to plan trips. If we have an ineffective website, this won't happen and could have negative implications on the tourism economy across the county.
- M 13. To increase and optimise the performance.
- M 14. To ensure that we are being responsible Stewards of public funding; to ensure we're meeting consumer needs.
- M 15. Because it is an important media for us to interact with existing and potential clients.

- M 16. To improve the quality of information provided to visitors. To improve the visitor journey and usability of the site. To measure the success of the website and the effectiveness of our SEO strategy. To measure return on investment To benchmark against other destination sites.
- M 17. To ensure we're effective in promoting Norfolk tourism.
- M 18. To further improve it.
- M 19. We want to see who is visiting our site. What they are looking for. How often they are returning and general search trends.
- M 20. In order to improve our offering to the customer & measure the effectiveness of our service.
- M 21. To improve our destination visibility on online channels.
- M 22. The bulk of our marketing dollars are spent on advertising campaigns designed to drive people to our website to start planning their vacations. We evaluate to ensure our campaigns are finding the right audiences and to ensure we are spending dollars wisely.
- M 23. Because we want to update the website and need to know what's best, what path to follow.
- M 24. To ensure it meets visitor needs.
- M 25. To ensure that our website is serving its sole purpose and so we can ensure the target audience are receiving everything they want from the website.
- M 26. To report to funding organisations and to increase ROI.
- M 27. To determine new trends and how best to meet needs of consumers, industry partners and political promos.
- M 28. To ensure it is fulfilling its function for our visitors, to measure the success of our social media marketing and to find ways to improve our website and sure it continues to meet customers' needs.
- M 29. Our website represents the tourist offer of our city and it is very important for us to communicate the cultural offer, events, and accommodation possibilities as well as to increase the interest of potential tourists.
- M 30. To increase the effectiveness and improve performance.
- M 31. To check it's doing the job we want it to do and that it's reaching potential customers.
- M 32. So that we can make improvements and to make sure that we are giving the visitor to the website valuable information.
- M 33. To use findings to improve the site's usefulness to visitors.

- M 34. Because we want to know if our clients find the desired information.
- M 35. Optimisation.
- M 36. One goal. Increases visitor spending and arrivals to Fiji.
- M 37. To improve the Website to our Users needs to see the impact of campaigns to see the development of the website.
- M 38. To monitor what content the user needs. If we are using the right applications. If we have the necessary information for making a booking.
- M 39. Evaluate the site see the quantity of information, the quality of the information, the design and aspects of the site, is effectively giving customers what they are looking for.
- M 40. To further understand our end user and traffic patterns.
- M 41. Make sure it's inspiring travelers
- M 42. To make sure that the content is relevant to the changing needs of both the consumer and our tourism partners.
- M 43. For optimization.
- M 44. Website is main digital channel for communication with potential tourists. It needs to be updated, working well, as well as informative and inspiring in terms of content. Evaluation helps to come up with conclusions what is good and what needs to be improved.
- M 45. To adapt our website to the constant evolutions of the web and the demand.
- M 46. To adapt our strategies if needed.

How often do you update the effectiveness of evaluation process? (Answered: 46, Skipped: 0)

- M 1. Per year.
- M 2. This is not based on time, rather on need and technology updates. If there is a new tool that can help our presence we adopt it and update our evaluation process to include it accordingly. Or, if there is an evaluation tool that can help us in evaluating more effectively, we also include it in our process. A recent addition included Realtime Analytics that allow us to monitor the behaviour of our visitors in realtime, and the result of this will be a new addition to the website to better support our visitors.
- M 3. Once a month.
- M 4. Monthly.
- M 5. Once a year.

- M 6. Tous les mois.
- M 7. every year.
- M 8. Depending on how often we can have a group discussion. With our team some of us are based here on island whilst the rest of the team are based overseas. With the team back on island we update the effectiveness of the evaluation process one a month of once every 2 months, we do however have a person designated to monitor these evaluation processes.
- M 9. Constantly.
- M 10. Once a month.
- M 11. Once a year.
- M 12. We are constantly updating the evaluation process. Analytics are always changing and how people search is changing.
- M 13. Yearly.
- M 14. We watch analytics all the time; more formal usability and user testing are done when we observe problems via analytics or are undertaking major overhauls.
- M 15. Once a month.
- M 16. Quarterly.
- M 17. Monthly.
- M 18. 1 - 4 years.
- M 19. It's always changing..
- M 20. N/A.
- M 21. Often enough.
- M 22. We are constantly working to ensure our evaluation criteria guide us to making the best use of our available resources.
- M 23. Almost never.
- M 24. approx every quarter.
- M 25. every couple of months.
- M 26. Annually.
- M 27. annually or if an issue has been noted.
- M 28. Every six months for the results of our website survey, but updates and when if a particularly valid point comes through from customers.
- M 29. It depends on the results of the evaluation. We analyse the data of the evaluation and we decide how to proceed.
- M 30. At least annually.
- M 31. Monthly.

- M 32. The website is evaluated on a daily basis and if anything flags up, then it is dealt with straight away.
- M 33. Constantly.
- M 34. Approximately once a month, but increase the effectiveness need some budget and sometimes we could not find it.
- M 35. Yearly.
- M 36. Every 6 months.
- M 37. When we find we need to, sometimes once a month and then once a year
- M 38. N/A.
- M 39. Haven't yet.
- M 40. Every quarter.
- M 41. Not often.
- M 42. Kind of a "continuous improvement" cycle. Always trying to find better ways to get better information.
- M 43. 6 times a year.
- M 44. Once in quarter.
- M 45. Each month.
- M 46. Once a year or more if needed.

What is your role in the organization? Please specify your responsibility? (Answered: 46, Skipped: 0)

- M 1. MIS / Website Maintenance.
- M 2. Communications officer. My responsibilities are focused on the web presence of the Jordan Tourism Board, including the management of websites, social media channels and online campaigns. I coordinate with different departments internally, including marketing and research, and externally with our digital agency to achieve the best results regarding our online presence.
- M 3. Head of Channel Management I am responsible for the budgetary and content (inbound) marketing strategies that support and synergise with the Board's two other core frontline functions – Marketing and Corporate Communications. This function covers all the Board's digital, social media and mobile apps platforms. These include the two music festivals websites that the Board owns and organizes; the Borneo Jazz Festival and the Rainforest World Music Festival. I oversee a team of nine tourist coordinators spread over the three information centers in Sarawak serving visitors with local knowledge of tourism experiences.

- M 4. I'm responsible of marketing unit in Egyptian tourism Authority (only me in this unit).
- M 5. Senior Manager Campaign: Social Media, Campaigns, SEO, SEA.
- M 6. Webmaster.
- M 7. PR, content management.
- M 8. My role is the Media and Events Assistant.
- M 9. UK marketing & communications.
- M 10. Marketing Manager.
- M 11. Head of IT unit.
- M 12. Tourism manager. I oversee all the operations of the Tourism department including web development, product development and marketing.
- M 13. Marketing Organisation.
- M 14. Director, integrated marketing- oversee the teams responsible for driving innovation on platforms & publishing teams responsible for site content.
- M 15. The Owner and founder.
- M 16. Tourism Assistant, responsible for managing the content on the Visit Hampshire website and the social media channels.
- M 17. Strategic voice of tourism for Norfolk and official website.
- M 18. Online Content Editor.
- M 19. Web Manager.
- M 20. Electronic Marketing Assistant.
- M 21. IT coordinator (and the marketing team).
- M 22. Communications manager.
- M 23. Advertising and communication coordinator.
- M 24. Web editor/online marketing manager.
- M 25. Digital Marketer.
- M 26. Digital manager.
- M 27. Project Manager for Division of Tourism and vendors for web and mobile app creation, design, and functionality. Lead program person for CMS/CRM. Create and implement web policy, review program and agency needs to establish best method to meet new project requirements.
- M 28. Digital Marketing Executive. Working with the digital team on website maintenance and updates, social media marketing, email marketing, liaison with tourism industry in our region, performance measurement.
- M 29. Marketing department.

- M 30. Account Director, Agency responsible for online marketing.
- M 31. Marketing Manager.
- M 32. Digital Analytics and Insights Analyst..
- M 33. Director Digital Solutions In charge of a team responsible for digital touchpoints management and development, but not content strategy. Back end technical development.
- M 34. The association's overall objective of promoting the development of tourism and promote in Switzerland and abroad by assuming the tasks laid down in the legislation on tourism. It establishes a tourism strategy that is part of the policy of urban marketing to promote the economic, cultural and social influence of Lausanne in respect of sustainable development. Our actions Coordinate and / or support efforts to promote tourism Facilitate and enhance the admission and residence of hosts; Enhance the natural, urban and cultural; Develop or support the organization of congresses and events in the interest of tourism Organize, create, promote and / or coordinate all marketing or promotional activities which tend to Lausanne and neighboring municipalities involved; Guide the development and supply of tourism products.
- M 35. emarketing.
- M 36. Website Manager. - Recruiting all industry partners to sign up on Tourism Fiji's destination website. - Population of all activities, events, accommodation listing on www.fiji.travel - Moderate web content submitted for publishing - Maintenance of Website - Assisting user issues - Population of Tourism Fiji's corporate site www.fiji.travel/corporate.
- M 37. Team manager digital marketing b2c
- M 38. Webmaster, responsible for visitBergen.com and other channel sites.
Responsible for Social and Digital Media.
- M 39. Tourism information services coordinator
- M 40. Lead Developer.
- M 41. Research and visitor services mgr.
- M 42. Manager of Communications (Marketing) & Tourism.
- M 43. Webmaster.
- M 44. Responsible for research and digital marketing - website development, SEO, content strategy, SEA, design etc.
- M 45. I am the editorial webmaster.
- M 46. Social Media Manager (Online Marketing).

Appendix XII. URLs of the participants

URL	
khk.travel/tw/default1.asp	www.Travelnt.com
www.visitderby.co.uk	www.Traveloregon.com
www.zagreb-touristinfo.hr	www.travelsd.com
www.sarawaktourism.com	www.vienna.info
www.austria.info/uk	www.visitBergen.com
www.bolzano-bozen.it	www.visitbrighton.com
www.clarington-tourism.ca	www.visitcornwall.com
www.egypt.travel	www.visitcyprus.com
www.en.lyon-france.com	www.visitgibraltar.gi
www.explorethebruce.com	www.visitguelphwellington.ca
www.explorewaterlooregion.com	www.visit-hampshire.co.uk
www.fiji.travel	www.visithelsinki.fi
www.great-yarmouth.co.uk	www.visiticeland.com
www.ilovechile.cl	www.visitjordan.com
www.iloveny.com	www.visitlisboa.com
www.latvia.travel	www.visitluxembourg.com
www.lausanne-tourisme.ch	www.visitmanchester.com
www.massvacation.com	www.VisitMO.com
www.meet-in-shanghai.net	www.visitnorfolk.co.uk
www.niueisland.com	www.visitPA.com
www.thegreatwaterway.com	www.visitplymouth.co.uk
www.toulouse-tourisme.com	www.visitscotland.com/
www.tourismus.li/en/	www.zuerich.com