

A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON WEB-BASED MARKETING TOOLS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Today, the globalization of the world economy and the rapid development of the technology sharpens competition amongst the companies. Along with the rapidly developing innovations, conventional trade approaches in the field of information technology has started to gain different perspectives. Information and communication technologies provide significant support for web marketing practices in virtual environments in last two decades. The assessments of the web sites of tourism establishments provide positive effects for the customers that search holiday on the Internet. In this paper, web-based online marketing tools in tourism industry have been discussed, and suggestions were given.

Keywords: *Tourism Industry, Online Marketing, Tourism Websites.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid developments in information and communication Technologies (ICTs) in recent years have a critical importance for the competitiveness of businesses, operating in the tourism industry. Issues such as the frequency of using information technologies and the extent to which tourism regions can get closer to the market by making use of information technologies are evaluated in the context of competitive advantage. Marketing attempts in tourism industry is one of the factors affecting demand that needs to be supported by information and communication technologies. As a result of the rapid developments in ICTs, its support to the industry reached an increasingly critical point. Although the main principles are similar, it is a fact that national tourism organizations and businesses in tourist-oriented countries gain experience in advertising, information, strategic planning, research, promotional material production and sales development. Countries now are aware of the fact that market segments, market information, product development, correct target audience selection and improvement of quality criteria are also important.

It is one of the issues that businesses and national tourism organizations should be aware of, where the competition in world tourism is sharpening, the amount of tourism regions and products are constantly increasing, and the necessity of making a sustainable effort by making use of today's technology in order to maintain market shares at the national level. In this respect, changes in the characteristics of consumers and tourists, who have

become more conscious in all aspects, should be constantly monitored. Following the developments in the industry is of vital importance for the product and service providers that make up tourism. Satisfying the needs and demands of consumers in particular depends on the products and services they offer in terms of service and/or product providers. For this reason, tourism industry is one of the areas where information and communication technologies are used frequently and widely. The promotion of products related to regional and national tourism has been carried out through classical distribution channels for many years. In the early 1980s, business started to be carried out through new distribution channels, which provided the opportunity to reach the consumer quickly, thanks to the developments in information and communication technologies. It is an indisputable fact that the demands and needs of the consumer are important in promotion and advertisements in the industry. Individuals that own mobile communication tools that can access all kinds of information no longer need to access classical tools to reach product or service. As a result, they constantly demand better products and services, because they are more selective and can change holiday decisions very quickly.

For that reason, the decision-making process for the consumers on destination and holiday selection is shortened. Many changes, such as last minute deals, have revealed the necessity of making a serious restructuring in the use of ICTs in the tourism industry. In this paper, it is aimed to examine web-

based online marketing tools in tourism industry. In the following section the concepts of marketing, Internet and online marketing are discussed. Then, websites and their marketing component along with marketing strategies are given.

2. MARKETING

The concept of marketing, which showed itself at the beginning of the 20th century, has been evaluated in different ways over the years, developing within itself and with environmental actors. The concept has developed and changed from the time it emerged and has always been handled differently with its changing aspects. According to Kotler “Marketing emerged with the first human. If we consider the first story in the Bible, we see that Eve tricked Adam into eating the forbidden fruit. But Eve was not the first marketer, it was the serpent who persuaded her to deceive Adam.” (Kotler, 2004: 16).

Marketing is a set of actions that start before producing the goods and continue after the product has been sold. Market research is carried out with many researches before the production of the product, the needs and wishes of the consumers are determined, and the marketing program is prepared with the information found as a result of the researches. Subsequently, the necessary program for production is prepared and all marketing activities are audited together with the sales made by putting it into practice. The information found as a result of these processes is transferred to the company again through marketing (Yükselen, 1994: 12).

According to the most accepted definition of marketing today, it is the planning and implementation process that enables the pricing, development, distribution and promotion of products, services and ideas in order to realize the transformations necessary to achieve individual and organizational goals (Mucuk, 2006: 3-4). Marketing, which has many definitions in the literature, is a system of many and varied activities; relates to goods, services and ideas; It is stated that it is a shopping activity that will meet the needs of the individual and it is carried out in a dynamic structure, in a sustainable and frequently changing environment.

The concept of marketing also contains important elements within itself. In the literature, these elements are defined as “Marketing Mix”. The marketing mix has been formulated as the 4Ps of

marketing. The marketing mix elements expressed by McCarthy in the 1960s were expressed as product (Product), price (Price), promotion and distribution (Place) and were coded as 4P based on the initials of their names. Later, physical evidence, participants (Participants) and process management (Process management) elements were added to the 4Ps and it was suggested to express the marketing mix as 7P. As a result of the new understandings that emerged in the changing world with the 90s, the elements of the marketing mix, with a customer-oriented approach, are customer value, customer cost, customer communication (customer communication) and customer management. It was proposed by Robert Lauterborn to express it as 4C as a result of the combination of the concepts of customer convenience. By using the direct marketing approach, businesses can establish closer relations with their current and potential customers (Ecer and Canitez, 2005: 307).

3. INTERNET

The concept of the Internet was formed by the abbreviation of the “International Network” term; The concept of the internet, which is literally explained as "network between networks", can be defined as a giant computer network that connects millions of computers on earth (Özdipçiner, 2010: 7). The Internet is a multi-protocol network and can be expressed as all interconnected computer networks. It was formed by the interconnection of thousands of academic and commercial networks and public and private computer networks. The Internet first emerged as a military project in the United States.

Changes in today's global economy can affect the competition process in terms of businesses and the management processes of businesses depending on competition. The information and speed that affects lives and the transformation experienced in the period we are in have led to new expansions in both the behavior of people and businesses (Acar & Acar, 2020: 28).

Today, the internet has turned into a network system that can be connected at any time without being connected to a person or any institution (Bayram, 2008: 10). At the point reached today, the internet is the biggest and best information provider (Azdel et al., 2011: 88). The Internet is an information

provider that is with the users at every moment of life. The Internet is a structure that people constantly need today, just like their basic life needs. The Internet is a dynamically structured communication system that constantly adds new services to its service portfolio. With the beginning of the commercial use of the internet, the internet has started to serve as a new communication channel, a new distribution channel and a new media medium for marketing (Kircova, 2012: 6).

It is stated that the traffic on the Internet increases twice every hundred days. With this experienced and ongoing digital transformation, small businesses have been provided with the opportunity to open up to global markets. As a result of this digital revolution, marketers have to rethink what customer value is. The resulting how to communicate this value to the customer for delivery and how would you posted once again to think attachments are obliged. They have to further develop the skills they use to manage their customers. They need the opinions and suggestions of their customers in order to implement the design of the desired products together (Kotler et al., 2010: 213-214).

4. ONLINE MARKETING

The Internet offers the opportunity to conduct one-to-one, direct and interactive communication and marketing activities by establishing a connection. It offers the opportunity to perform the promotion, sale of services and products and the costs of services to be realized after the sale more effectively and individually (Mites and Kayak, 2007: 42). With this increase, electronic commerce (e-commerce) has become a concept that has a critical importance in today's world and has made a very rapid entry into lives. E-commerce is spreading gradually as a result of a rapid progress in communication and information technologies in the last part of the century we live in (Acar and Tunca, 2015: 551).

Along with the growth of the Internet, marketing activities are also developing. This development also affects business activities. As long as the Internet continues its trade-intensive function and is

one of the most important tools of the purchasing process, it will continue to be one of the main channels of the marketing sector.

The fact that consumers spend more time in online environments has led companies to invest in online marketing. The concept of online marketing means marketing, conducting through the internet. Online advertisements and promotions, e-mail, online video and blogs and websites are used for this marketing method. Businesses use the online advertising method to increase their sales figures, gain customers, and increase the number of visitors on the online platform. With online ads, businesses are promoting their goods and services by publishing unique ads to their target audience 24/7. This is included in the promotion component of the marketing mix.

Another online marketing method is email marketing. E-mail marketing maintains its place in marketing applications as an important and constantly growing sector. In order to reach a target audience, the e-mail method is generally preferred for information, product promotion and celebration messages sent by businesses and/or brands. The correct and appropriate use of e-mails mediates high-level sales (Özdemir, 2015). Online videos are the placement of digital video content on brands websites or social media sites such as Youtube and Facebook. Some advertisements are prepared specifically for web pages. A well-crafted online advertisement reaches millions of people and increases brand awareness. If online videos are interesting, they reach consumers by word of mouth. All kinds of videos can spread on the internet, contributing to brand participation and positive promotion (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018: 518).

5. WEBSITES AS A MARKETING TOOLS

With the changing era, the expectations of consumers from businesses have also changed. Consumers do not want to spend much time to reach a product. In addition, the availability of information about the product and the convenience of accessing this information are also important

factors for consumers. Considering all these factors, businesses carry out their marketing activities over the internet. Internet businesses which provide internet facilities is also discussed marketing activities carried out is quite favorable. Businesses reach consumers at any time through online marketing applications. Among these applications, the websites that provide the most information about the business are the websites that businesses create as virtual stores. A website is a compilation of pages that are generally related to each other and connected to the same server (Duygun & Alnıpak, 2017).

Most Web sites ported density on a particular topic, called the home page, exceeding links with other sites web pages that are available. Internet's place in daily lives increase with businesses along with low-tended costs and due to its success in reaching the consumer website. Businesses carry out activities such as product promotion and product sales through their websites. Websites, one of the popular marketing methods of recent times, are considered quite successful in providing information to customers and selling products. Businesses offer business promotion and product information to consumers through their websites. Access to websites from anywhere provides great convenience to consumers.

In order for a website to be successful, it must provide four basic functions. These; programs to provide up-to-date and accurate information, to communicate effectively and continuously with consumers, to provide reliable and uninterrupted electronic transactions, and to establish appropriate and sustainable relationships. The basic function of a website, a product to consumers that the time to examine the items on the right and fed the c knowledge that the moment is that (Li, Wang & Yu, 2015). The existence of an effective website has become the most important element of the integrated marketing strategies of the businesses on the internet. Many marketing activities that are done with traditional marketing methods can also be done on the internet. Services such as advertising, sales development, sales transactions, and after-sales support are carried out in a low-cost and effective manner through websites. An effective website

development process consists of five stages. These are the definitions, design, development, installation and protection stages. They are also called the 5d of the website strategy (Aksoy, 2012: 47-49).

Marketers meet customer expectations with developing technologies. While doing this, it benefits from a platform where the contact with the consumer is high by using websites. Businesses use the web as a marketing tool for various reasons. These reasons can be counted as follows (Sever, 2000);

- Reaching previously unknown or inaccessible reasons affecting purchasing behavior,
- Projecting a positive corporate image,
- Providing information about the product,
- Creating adequate guidance for salespeople,
- Evaluating customer complaints and recommendations, and
- Providing access to the working systems of organizations.

Businesses should first introduce themselves to consumers by providing corporate information on their websites. Information such as product information, price lists, distribution network, support services, fields of activity of the enterprise should be included in the web pages. An important purpose of websites is to create a strong company image. Businesses trans virtual store in online marketing image because they appeal to consumers against a damp factor comes into. In today's conditions, the lack of time of people or their unwillingness to go to the store have been effective in increasing the importance of this marketing tool. The important point here is to examine whether the websites are managed successfully and whether there are positive returns to the business.

6. FEATURES OF WEB SITES IN TERMS OF TOURISM SECTOR-WEB MARKETING STRATEGIES

Along with the development in the tourism industry, the changes in business practices and strategies started with the developments in information

technologies, especially after the 1980s (Ho & Lee, 2007: 1434). Informatics, finance, energy, retail and tourism sectors are among the sectors in which e-commerce is used extensively in the world (Ölçer & Özyılmaz, 2007: 3).

Among the places where the Internet is widely used, the tourism industry is the leading one (Middleton & Clarke, 2001:155). The Internet is widely used in all areas of the tourism industry. The Internet has a very important place in the tourism industry as a neo-communication channel and a neo- distribution channel (Karamustafa & Öz, 2010: 190). The easiest way for tourism businesses to know about their existence on the internet is to have a website. To have a website of touristic enterprises; It is the shortest and least costly way to go beyond the concept of place and time and reach potential tourists all over the world.

Prompt definition of consumer needs, comprehensive presentation, individualisation, direct communication and up-to-date information; It is expressed as the success key of the Internet by the World Tourism Organization (Castaneda et al., 2009: 549). With the development in technology, customers have gained knowledge of many and different services and products that concern them, and have had the opportunity to choose among these products and services. This is true for the service sector, just as it is for all other sectors. Thanks to the rapidly developing and easily accessible databases, they can make the choice decisions they want (Aksu, 2000: 7).

Tourism businesses can use the Internet for various marketing activities such as promotion, sales, distribution and customer relations. Beyond that, many tourism businesses have the opportunity to use the Internet in their relations with other tourism businesses they interact with. (Sarı & Kozak, 2005: 257).

The reasons why the parties of the tourism sector avoid electronic commerce can be considered in two different groups as the reasons arising from the customer or the company providing the service and the reasons arising from the Internet. In addition to reasons such as insecurity, inexperience in computer use, lack of knowledge of the customer,

the concrete features of the service and product on the Internet are reduced to the minimum level, the lack of sufficient alternatives, the data not kept up-to-date, There are also business or Internet-related reasons, such as too little or too much information (Pınar, 2005: 43).

In the tourism sector, where there are a lot of areas where information technologies can be used, businesses can use information technologies a lot in between businesses, within the organization and in communication with the consumer. It is possible to make advertisement, purchase, production of travel services, delivery and payment transactions used in the tourism sector via the Internet. Other features that make the Internet more effective among other tools in terms of the tourism sector are the Internet's ability to transmit sound, image and a written text at the same time and faster. Travel and accommodation sales, which are the most important elements of tourism products and services, have been carried out over the Internet for years. However, destination and food and beverage are newer compared to other services (Dimitros, 2003: 11-12).

While planning a holiday, touristic consumers make researches on the internet and then decide to buy. This is an indication that it is very important for all tourism businesses to have a web page that can meet the expectations of touristic consumers and keep up with changing consumer needs. Tourism businesses should decorate their web pages with some features in order to reach potential tourists over the internet. Considering the studies carried out in previous years, some features that enable tourism websites to be functional have been examined under headings.

6.1. E-Mail

It is very important to have an e-mail address belonging to the business on the web pages of touristic businesses. Having an e-mail address belonging to the company on the web page allows current and potential consumers to contact the company quickly and inexpensively. A touristic consumer, while collecting information about the holiday he will buy on the web page of the touristic business, can convey what he wants to learn in line

with services or different needs, thanks to the e-mail feature.

In accordance with the philosophy of meeting consumer requests and needs, touristic businesses' instant response to mails sent to their e-mail addresses has an effect on increasing consumer satisfaction and confidence in the business.

6.2. Contact Information

Touristic businesses are required to include all contact information on their web pages. All communication tools such as the telephone number or call center number of the enterprise, fax number, full address, e-mail form should be included on the website. Thus, when the touristic consumer needs to contact the business about any situation, they will be able to easily do this with the help of the website.

6.3. Online Reservation and Online Payment Functions

The websites of touristic businesses should offer online reservation and online payment services to the consumers. Consumers will move on to the purchasing phase after completing the information gathering phase to purchase a vacation. As it is known, the distribution of tourism products is in the opposite direction. In other words, the consumer can benefit from a good or service purchased in the region where the good or service is located. Therefore, pre-reservation practices are essential in the marketing of touristic products. The fact that touristic businesses provide online reservation and online payment services on their websites can be a reason for preference for consumers.

Instead of making reservations through intermediaries or other methods, consumers will be able to make online reservations and purchases through websites. In addition, since the ability to make reservations and payments through websites is low-cost, it can provide businesses with a competitive advantage in the long run.

Online payments securely over the web sites of the year a need to be pillar. The consumer's credit card and bank card information and personal information must be secured. Global encryption protocols should be used to prevent card information and personal information from falling into the hands of

third parties. Otherwise, consumer grievance may arise.

6.4. Information on Discounts and Deals

Thanks to the websites, discounted prices and suitable holiday opportunities can be easily announced to touristic consumers. Tourist businesses, discount and opportunities may gain on web pages can collect more demanding chord. Applications such as early booking opportunities and price discounts should be placed on the web page as a banner so that the touristic consumer can notice. In addition, the presence of links about discounts and opportunities on the web pages can easily direct the touristic consumer to the relevant tab and helps the touristic consumer to take advantage of the appropriate holiday opportunity.

6.5. Feedback Form

Feedback forms provide an effective and continuous communication with the consumers. It is thanks to the feedback forms that the people who visit web sites can write their suggestions and that a more effective web page is created in line with these suggestions. Undoubtedly, consumer satisfaction has an important role in the tourism industry. Consumers can convey their satisfaction or dissatisfaction to the relevant units through feedback forms. The functioning of the feedback forms is very important. The automatic sending of messages indicating that the messages written by the users have been forwarded to the relevant unit can be considered as the first notification to the users. The response of the authorized unit to the messages sent by the users should be sent soon, and solutions should be offered.

6.6. Visual and Audio Features

Tourism services are intangible products. Consumers do not have the chance to test such products while purchasing them. In other words, those services are consumed where they are produced. As a result, the importance of the promotion function in terms of marketing activities is gradually increasing. For example, on the web page of an accommodation business; various visual and audio applications such as the photo gallery of the rooms, the photo gallery of the restaurants, the photo gallery of the various activity venues, the

photo galleries about the region, the promotional videos of the accommodation business, the promotional videos of the region should be included in the web pages.

Today, the rapid development of technology brings along various innovations. For example, the “360° Virtual Tour” feature on websites can be given as an example. An accommodation business can present the hotel's rooms and service areas to touristic consumers with a 360° angle thanks to panoramic photography. Thanks to the virtual tour in question, the touristic consumer may feel as if he is in the room and have the opportunity to examine it in detail. Audio features are also included in the virtual tour application.

6.7. Frequently Asked Questions

Touristic businesses can find solutions to basic consumer problems by creating a frequently asked questions section on their web pages. The fact that touristic businesses identify the main problems they deal with and present them on the website as a list with solution suggestions enables touristic consumers to find a solution to the related problem immediately. The existence and functioning of the frequently asked questions section has an effect on increasing consumer satisfaction.

6.8. Useful Links

The fact that touristic businesses have links to the websites of other institutions and organizations that consumers can easily benefit from helps touristic consumers have information about the region. The fact that touristic businesses include links of businesses in different destinations, which continue their activities within their own structure, can cause an effect to increase the awareness of touristic consumers. In addition, there is a mini map of the region where the business is located on the websites and the places to visit on this map, entertainment venues, museums, shopping centers, hospitals, etc. Marking the places will help the touristic consumers to have detailed information about the region easily.

7. CONCLUSION

Today, internet technologies are widely used in every part of the societies. Internet technologies

affect people's lives as well as they also affect and change their habits and behaviors as consumers.

Today, internet technologies are constantly evolving. The effectiveness of marketing activities carried out over effectively designing the websites owned by the businesses is also becoming more and more important.

Consumers can preview goods and services through websites they find. They can also have prior knowledge about goods and services. Internet technologies, which attract attention by many different sectors, also offers innovations for the tourism industry. It provides various benefits to businesses in the marketing of services in the industry. As in all sectors, in the tourism sector, marketing activities have become sustainable over the internet. The websites attracts more consumers as long as they design and operate their web sites strategically.

In this paper, strategic use the websites in the tourism industry is examined. Suggestions are also provided about how tourism sector websites should be.

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