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Promotion of Religious Tourism Sites on Facebook by NTOs

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Tourism related to religious sites and festivals, pilgrimage and spirituality is considered an extremely important sector of the tourism market. The true value of religious sites lies in supporting basic tourism products outside pilgrimage destinations, as churches, cathedrals and monasteries attract many visitors, including those who are not travelling for religious purposes only. For tourists who are not driven by religious motives, religious sites are no different than any other tourism attraction – they need to attract tourists' attention in order for them to decide to include those sites in their future trip. Therefore, appropriate promotion of religious sites is equally important as promotion of any other tourism product. Since modern promotion has mostly relocated from the traditional to the digital stage, this paper offers research on the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the National Tourism Organisation of Serbia compared to the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites by the NTOs of the defined competitive set, that is, NTOs of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. In order to provide more in-depth analysis, the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List was analysed, that is, NTOs of Italy, Spain, Germany and France. The study presented in this paper is focused on promotion of religious sites to all types of tourists, not only the religiously motivated ones. For the purpose of the research, all posts published by the official Facebook pages of the analysed NTOs during the period of one year were analysed. The research provides valuable insight into the frequency of promoting cultural tourism attractions and determining how many cultural tourism attractions promoted were religious sites. The posts promoting religious sites were analysed in more detail, therefore the most frequently promoted religious sites by the analysed NTOs were determined, the type of content used in order to promote them, as well as the level of interactivity of the posts promoting religious sites. The most important contribution of the research presented are the data on the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites compared to the overall engagement rate of the posts published by the analysed NTOs.

Key Words: cultural tourism, religious sites, digital marketing, social media marketing, destination marketing

Introduction

Tourism related to religious sites and festivals, pilgrimage and spirituality is considered an extremely important sector of the tourism market (Richards & Fernandes, 2007). Every year millions of people travel to major religious destinations around the world, both ancient and modern in origin (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Religion and spirituality are believed to be the most common motivators for travel and the number of religiously motivated travels is growing constantly (Trono, 2015), while its continued growth can be considered a trend in the future as well (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The importance of religious

tourism sites is constantly increasing, not only because of the rise of religiously motivated travel to sacred places, but because of their interconnection with other types of tourism as well. It is impossible to think of any travel without making contact with a religious site, no matter whether the tourism is taking place in rural, urban or nature-based destinations, to name a few. Thus, religious tourism sites have become an indispensable part of travel by all types of tourists. Accordingly, the importance of their adequate promotion can be easily inferred.

Even though religious sites can be considered 'traditional', their promotion should be modern, which

includes promotion via social media. With national tourism organisations being the cornerstones of the tourism marketing systems of every country, the question arises how much attention they give to the promotion of religious tourism sites, especially via social media. As a result, this paper offers analysis on the degree of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the National tourism organisation of Serbia, compared to the same activities by the defined competitive set which includes NTOs of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. The research is further expanded by comparing the mentioned activities of the National tourism organisation of Serbia with the same activities by the four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2020), that is, Italy, Spain, Germany and France.

The analysis which was carried out included all posts published on Facebook by these NTOs during the analysis period of one year. Facebook became the most popular social network almost 11 years ago (Press, 2018), and continues to be so, and for that reason it was chosen for this research. The study presented is focused on promotion of religious sites to all types of tourists and determines how many cultural tourism attractions promoted were religious sites, the most frequently promoted religious sites by the analysed NTOs, the type of content used in order to promote them, the level of interactivity of the posts promoting religious sites, as well as the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites published by the analysed NTOs.

Literature Review

Religious tourism is probably as old as religion itself and is considered the oldest type of tourism (Trono, 2015; Rinschede, 1992; Jackowski & Smith 1992). Religious tourism is motivated by the tourists' search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy in order to reinforce their spiritual experience (Irimiás & Michalkó, 2013; Olsen & Timothy, 2006; Vukonić 1996), but can also be driven by curiosity in the historic and artistic values of religious sites (Trono, 2015). There are a certain number of religious sites that represent the primary attraction or are a tourism destination in themselves, such as major pilgrimage or historical sites. However, the true value of religious sites lies in supporting basic tourism products outside pilgrimage destinations, as churches, cathedrals and monasteries which attract a

large number of visitors, including those who are not only travelling for religious purposes (Richards & Fernandes, 2007). Therefore, religious tourists can also be those only partially motivated by religion, as well as those who visit religious sites without any religious motivation but based only on architectural and cultural importance of the site (Csapo, 2012). Religious tourism often overlaps with cultural tourism and heritage tourism (Shinde, 2010), or it can be considered a separate form of tourism, such as a type of cultural tourism (Raj, 2008; Csapo, 2012; Olsen & Timothy, 2006; McKercher *et al.*, 2002; Rinschede, 1992).

For tourists who are not driven by religious motives, religious sites are no different from any other tourism attractions – they need to attract tourists' attention in order for them to decide to include these sites in their future trip. Therefore, appropriate promotion of religious sites is equally important as promotion of any other tourism product. Modern promotion of tourism products has mostly relocated from the traditional to the digital stage. Internet presentation and social media presence have become indispensable parts of modern marketing strategies of every tourism product, while mobile applications, virtual tours and augmented reality are gaining more importance every day (particularly in recent times with the constraints of COVID-19).

The Internet has evolved from being a simple broadcasting medium to the platform that enables its users to become the media themselves by collaborating and sharing information (Li & Wang, 2011; Thevenot, 2007). It has been well documented that social media enables easy communication between users (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Williams *et al.*, 2012; Shao, 2009), possibilities of creating various types of content (Hajli, 2014; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2007), as well as access to an abundance of information. Changing the perspective from the users' to the companies' point of view, it has been noted that social media can help tourism companies and organisations engage potential tourists and increase their online presence (Leung *et al.*, 2013). Travel related literature confirms that social media plays an important role as a tourism marketing tool (Leung *et al.*, 2013; Chan & Guillet, 2011; Inversini *et al.*, 2009; Munar, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Numerous papers have been published on the subject of promoting religious sites (Aktaş *et al.*, 2007; Choe & O'Regan, 2015; Khan *et al.*, 2019; Neveu, 2010; Zhang *et al.*, 2007), however, very few authors

have addressed the issue of promoting religious tourism sites via social media (Cerutti & Piva, 2015; Ferencová *et al.*, 2014; Paschinger, 2019; Yeşil, 2013).

National tourism organisations (NTOs) have been affected by the changes in modern marketing activities brought by developments in social media. Marketing a tourism destination used to be problematic without a clear understanding on how the destination is understood by the tourists (Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006). However, establishing tourists' views on the destination and determining its strongest and weakest parts is made easier by a wealth of information provided by the tourists themselves available on social media. Therefore, NTOs can now easily access that information. Gretzel *et al.* (2006) determined that the greatest challenge for the marketing activities of an NTO was adapting to more recent technological changes. A great number of NTOs developed their official websites over the past decade or two. However, the Internet has evolved rapidly in the meantime, especially with the rise of social media. Not all NTOs were quick enough to answer those changes. Research conducted in 2010 showed that less than half of the 39 NTOs that were members of the European Travel Commission at the time had official Facebook pages (Stankov *et al.*, 2010). However, currently there are 32 members of the European Travel Commission, and all of them do have official Facebook pages where they publish regularly. In addition to being present on the leading social media, the importance of using the technology appropriately must be emphasised (Schegg *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, a clear understanding of why and how social media functions is vital for NTOs to be able to market their destination(s) properly (Hays *et al.*, 2013). Listening to the tourists' opinions about the destination, enhancing customer relationship, calling for interaction and creating interesting and engaging content which will promote all the different types of tourism available in a country are only some of the cornerstones of appropriate use of social media by NTOs.

Research Methodology

Having in mind the importance of social media marketing in promoting tourism attractions and destinations by NTOs, this paper offers research on the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the National Tourism Organisation of Serbia compared to the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites by the NTOs belonging to the defined competitive set for Serbia.

The countries selected for the research are surrounding countries with similar tourism products (Armenski *et al.*, 2011) that are competing with tourism products in Serbia (Popesku & Pavlović, 2013). Therefore, the NTOs of Slovenia, Bulgaria¹, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia² were selected. In order to provide more in-depth analysis, the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the NTOs of Italy, Spain, Germany and France was analysed. These countries were selected as the four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2020). In addition, the selected countries have the leading share in terms of promotion of religious sites, which is the basis for their inclusion in the analysis. In order to conduct the research, all posts published by the official Facebook pages of the selected NTOs from January 1st 2018 to December 31st 2018 were analysed. Quantitative content analysis was selected as the primary method of research, based on the same selection by numerous authors researching the communication between NTOs and tourists (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Mariani *et al.*, 2016, 2018; Uşaklı *et al.*, 2017, Villamediana *et al.*, 2019).

According to the subject of the research, first of all, the frequency of promoting certain tourism attractions was determined, regardless of the type. The analysis was continued by establishing the frequency of promoting cultural tourism attractions, and lastly, determining how many cultural tourism attractions promoted were religious sites. The posts promoting religious sites were analysed in more detail. Firstly, the religious sites which were most frequently promoted by the NTOs were analysed. Some of the more detailed analysis of the posts promoting religious sites included the level of interactivity of the posts, that is, determining how often those posts prompted users to ask a question or to ask them to share their own content related to the religious site promoted. Finally, the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious tourism was established. In general, determining the success rate of the posts published by

- 1 Bulgaria does not have an official NTO – *Official Tourism Portal of Bulgaria* established by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria is responsible for the promotion of tourism and manages the Facebook page which was analysed.
- 2 Slovakia does not have an official NTO – *Official Information Portal Slovakia Travel* established by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic is responsible for the promotion of tourism and manages the Facebook page which was analysed.

Table 1: Frequency of promoting tourism attractions, cultural tourism attractions and religious sites by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of the defined competitive set

Country	Promotion of tourism attractions	Promotion of cultural tourism attraction	Promotion of religious sites
NTO Serbia	49.8%	35%	11.6%
NTO Slovenia	37.1%	10.7%	2.8%
NTO Bulgaria	30.3%	22.3%	6.3%
NTO Hungary	52.2%	35%	5.7%
NTO Czech Republic	42.9%	40%	3.9%
NTO Slovakia	46.8%	35.4%	5.1%

Source: Authors

NTOs can be very difficult considering the fact that the data on the posts available to visitors of the page are very limited. However, the authors Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015) offer the following formula on calculating the engagement rate:

$$\text{Engagement rate} = \frac{\text{Total engagement (likes + comments + shares)}}{\text{total followers}^3}$$

This formula does not include information available to page administrators only and allowed us to calculate the overall engagement rate, as well as the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites.

Results and Discussion

Most of the analysed NTOs have multiple Facebook pages available in different languages, however, only the Facebook pages that are linked to the official websites of the NTOs were selected for this research. During the period of one year, the median frequency of posting among all the analysed NTOs was 1.16 posts per day. The NTO that published the highest number of posts was NTO of Italy with 2.71 posts per day, while the lowest number of posts was registered in case of NTO of the Czech Republic, only 0.56 per day. The NTO of Serbia published 303 posts, that is, a little over 0.8 posts per day.

NTO of Serbia compared to the defined competitive set

After determining the number of posts published during the analysis period, the next step was to analyse their contents. In line with the research methodology, the first part of the data refer to the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the NTO of Serbia compared to the same activities by the defined

competitive set, that is, NTOs of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. Determining the frequency of promoting tourism attractions, cultural tourism attractions and religious tourism sites by the analysed NTOs was the first step of the content analysis and these data are presented in Table 1.

The data presented show that when it comes to the promotion of tourism attractions, the NTO of Hungary promoted certain tourism attractions in more than half of their posts, while the NTO of Bulgaria did so in less than one third of the posts. The majority of the attractions the NTOs promoted were cultural tourism attractions, except for the NTO of Slovenia which mostly promoted natural attractions. However, there is an important conclusion that can be drawn regarding the promotion of religious sites. The analysis showed that religious sites were very rarely promoted. Even though the NTO of Slovenia used the lowest number of their posts to promote religious sites (only 2.8% of posts), it must be noted that they rarely promoted cultural tourism attractions at all. Therefore, more attention should be drawn to the NTOs of Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia that used a high number of their posts in order to promote cultural tourism attractions, however, the frequency of promoting religious sites was fairly low. Compared to the NTOs of the defined competitive set, the NTO of Serbia promoted religious sites most often - in 11.6% of their posts. In addition, every third cultural tourism attraction promoted by Serbia's NTO was a religious site.

The analysis showed that most of the analysed NTOs promoted various religious sites equally, only once, with no particular site standing out. However, some of the NTOs used multiple posts to promote religious tourism

³ Number of followers was registered on February 10th 2019.

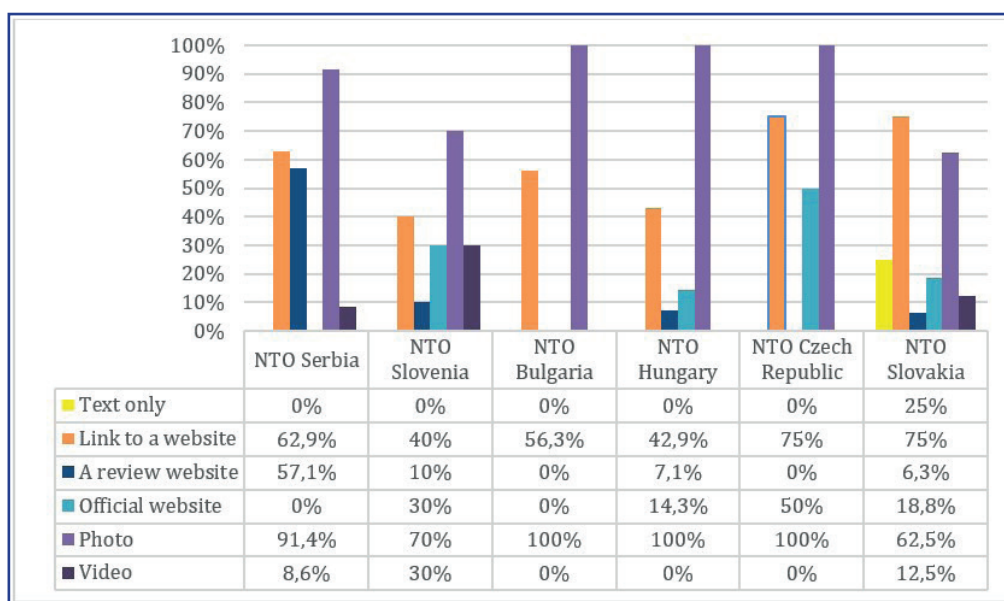
Figure 2: Example of Religious Tourism Facebook Post by Serbian Tourism (01.11.2018)

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/serbiatourism/photos/2501226333251674>.

in general, without mentioning a single religious tourism site in particular - this was the case for the NTOs of Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. On the other hand, some NTOs promoted one religious site more than once, hence the NTO of Slovakia promoted St. Martin's Cathedral in 12.5% of their posts and the NTO of Hungary promoted Pannonhalma Archabbey in 28.4% of their posts. The NTO of Serbia was the only national organisation that promoted various religious sites more than once. The most frequently promoted religious site was The Temple of Saint Sava, which was promoted in 25.7% of the posts,

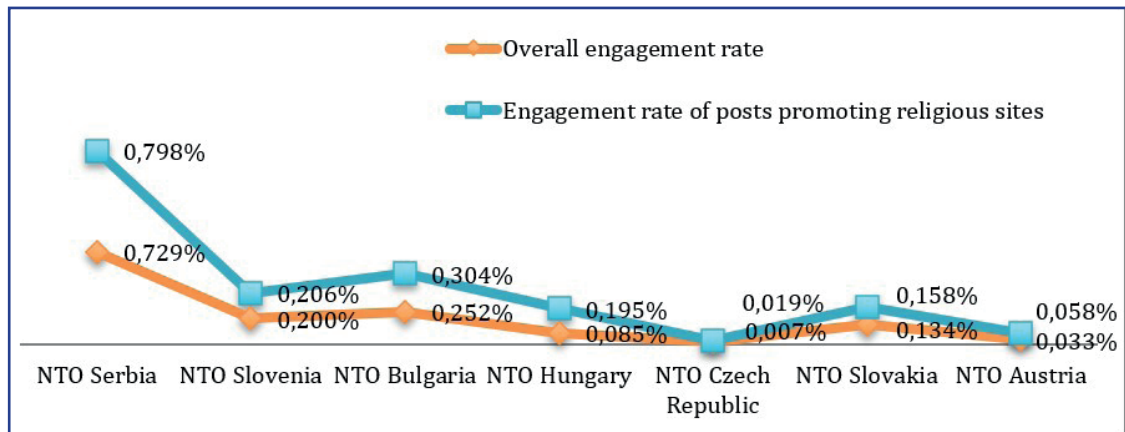
followed by Studenica Monastery (Figure 1) in 17.1% of the posts and the Cathedral in Novi Sad in 14.3% of the posts promoting religious sites. Besides the mentioned sites, the NTO of Serbia promoted 15 other religious sites, and 6 of these were promoted more than once.

The data on the type of content used for promoting religious sites are presented in Figure 2. The analysis shows that almost all posts by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of the defined competitive set included additional content, that is, only the NTO of Slovakia posted a number

Figure 2: Type of content used to promote religious tourism sites by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of the defined competitive set

Source: Authors.

Figure 3: Overall engagement rate vs. engagement rate of posts promoting religious sites by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of the defined competitive set



Source: Authors.

of text only posts to promote religious sites. In addition, using links to certain websites was quite common, however, those links were rarely review websites, except in the case of NTO of Serbia which frequently did use review websites to promote religious sites. On the other hand, none of the links to websites that the NTO of Serbia used to promote religious sites were links to the official NTO website. The only NTO that frequently used their official website in order to promote religious sites was the NTO of the Czech Republic. The vast majority of all posts by all the NTOs included a photo, emphasising the importance of visual representation. However, it was established that sharing videos of religious sites was not that frequent for most of the analysed countries, except for NTOs in Slovenia, Slovakia and Serbia which used videos in a number of their posts promoting religious sites.

The content analysis showed that only posts by NTOs of Slovakia, Slovenia and Serbia were interactive to some extent, that is, in 37.5%, 30% and 25.7% of the cases respectively. All the posts marked as interactive were simply asking users a question, and none of them were used in order to ask users to share their own content

related to the religious site promoted. Other NTOs did not call for interaction at all in their posts dedicated to promoting religious sites.

The overall engagement rate, as well as the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites was determined and the data are presented in Figure 3. As it can be seen, in case of the Serbian NTO and the NTOs of the defined competitive set, the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites was higher than the overall engagement rate of all the posts published during the analysed period of one year. In case of the Serbian NTO, the biggest difference between the overall engagement rate and the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious sites can be noticed. In addition, both engagement rates (overall posts and those focused on religious sites) by the NTO of Serbia are significantly higher compared to the NTOs of the defined competitive set.

NTO of Serbia compared to the NTOs of European Countries

The second part of the research refers to the frequency of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by the

Table 2: Number of cultural and religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List

Country	Number of sites on the UNESCO list	Number of cultural sites	Number of religious sites
Italy	55	50	23
Spain	48	42	23
Germany	46	43	19
France	45	39	17

Source: Adapted from UNESCO, 2020

Table 3: Frequency of promoting tourism attractions, cultural tourism attractions and religious sites by the NTO of Serbia and NTOs of countries with the highest number of sites on the UNESCO list

Country	Promotion of tourism attractions	Promotion of cultural tourism attraction	Promotion of religious sites
NTO Serbia	49.8%	35%	11.6%
NTO Italy	86.2%	60.1%	7.1%
NTO Spain	58.3%	50.1%	11.4%
NTO Germany	51.2%	39.3%	8.1%
NTO France	61.5%	34.9%	2.1%

Source: Authors

NTO of Serbia compared to the NTOs of four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, that is, NTOs of Italy, Spain, Germany and France. These four countries are also in the top five countries with the highest number of UNESCO protected sites in the world, with Italy sharing its first position with China. After analysing all the protected sites on the list, it was determined how many protected sites are cultural sites, and how many of them are religious sites. These data are presented in Table 2.

The same process was followed as for the NTOs of the defined competitive set for Serbia. The first step of the analysis included determining the frequency of promoting certain tourism attractions, establishing the frequency of promoting cultural tourism attraction and determining how many of the promoted cultural tourism attractions were religious sites. The data are presented in Table 3.

Similar to the data presented for the NTO of Serbia and the defined competitive set, the majority of tourism attractions which the NTOs of the four analysed countries promoted were cultural tourism attractions. However, religious sites were again very rarely promoted. The NTO with the lowest levels for promoting religious sites was the NTO of France that promoted them in only 2.1% of their posts - that is, in only 12 posts published during the analysed period of one year. The NTO that promoted religious sites to a greater extent than the others was the NTO of Spain. However, it must be noted that the NTO of Serbia promoted religious sites more often than the NTO of Spain. On the Serbian site, every third cultural attraction they promoted was a religious sites, while in case of the NTO of Spain, every fifth cultural attraction that they promoted was a religious sites.

The NTO of Italy promoted a large number of different religious sites, while 11 of them were promoted more

Figure 4: Example of Religious Tourism Facebook Post by Italian Tourism (27.09.2018)

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/italia.it/photos/a.191238277619099/1900316390044604>

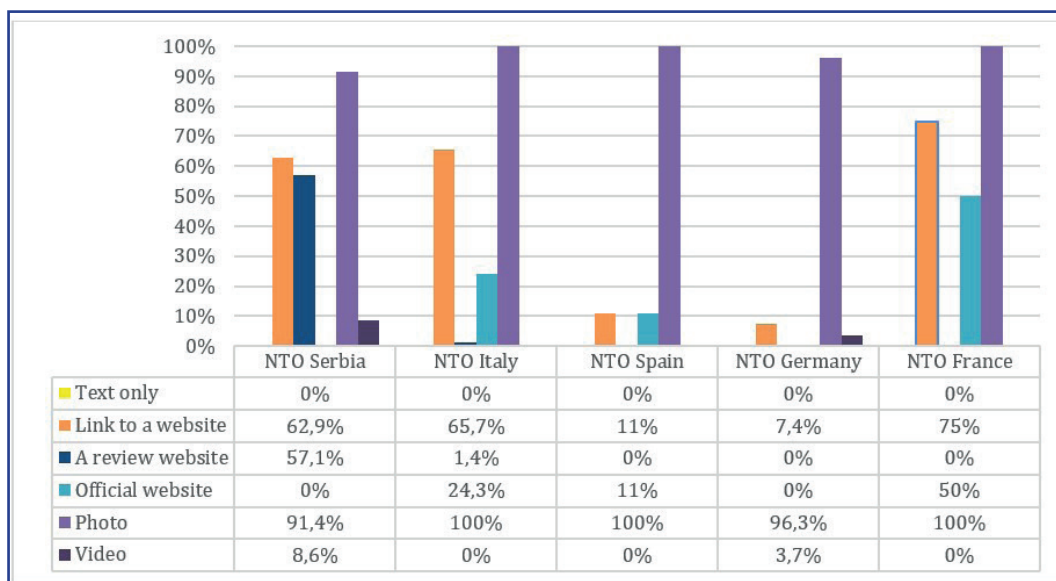
than once. The most frequently promoted religious site was the UNESCO protected Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna, with special attention given to the Basilica of San Vitale (Figure 5), in 11.4% of cases when there was a religious site promoted. In addition, the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi was promoted in 5.7% of the cases, while St. Peters Basilica was promoted in 4.3% of the cases. When it comes to the NTO of Spain, there were also a lot of religious sites promoted and 11 of them were promoted more than once. The most frequently promoted religious site was the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba in 11% of the cases, followed by the religious sites related to Camino de Santiago, including Santiago de Compostela Cathedral in 9.6% of the cases and Palma de Mallorca Cathedral in 6.8% of the posts promoting religious sites. The NTO of Germany promoted 22 different religious sites, but the only religious site promoted in two different posts was Naumburg Cathedral. All of the other religious sites were promoted only once. Finally, the NTO of France promoted only 7 different religious sites, and the only one promoted multiple times was Notre Dame Cathedral, in 33.3% of posts promoting religious sites.

When it comes to the type of content used for promoting religious sites, the data are presented in Figure 5. It can be noticed that there were no textual only posts, and the vast majority of the posts included a photo. Out of the four analysed NTOs, only the NTO of Germany used videos to some extent in order to promote religious sites. It must be noted that the NTOs of Spain and Germany added

links to websites less frequently than all the other NTOs, including the countries of the defined competitive set for Serbia. All of the links which the NTO of Spain added were links to the official NTO website, while the NTO of Germany did not add any links to the official website. In addition, none of the four analysed countries used review websites to a great extent in order to promote religious sites, as opposed to frequent use of review websites by the NTO of Serbia.

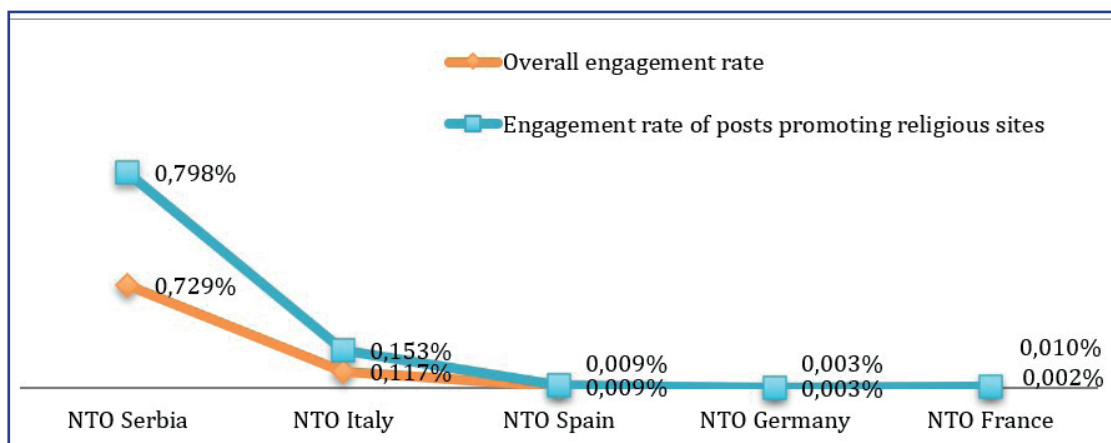
The interactivity of the posts was also analysed for the NTOs of four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The results showed that all of the analysed NTOs used at least some of their posts in order to call for interaction. The NTO of Spain stands out, considering the fact that 42.5% of their posts which were dedicated to promoting religious sites were asking users a question. It must be noted that the NTO of Serbia used more posts for asking users a questions than the other analysed NTOs, since 25.7% of their posts were interactive compared to the posts by the NTOs of France, Italy and Germany with 16.7%, 8.6% and 7.4% of posts being interactive, respectively. However, the interactive posts by all of the NTOs were only asking users simple questions, and none of the NTOs used a single post in order to ask users to share their own photos or videos with the official NTO Facebook page.

Figure 5: Type of content used to promote religious tourism sites by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO list.



Source: Authors.

Figure 6 Overall engagement rate vs. engagement rate of posts promoting religious sites by the NTO of Serbia and the NTOs of countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO list.



Source: Authors.

Lastly, the overall engagement rate of the posts published by the four NTOs, as well as the engagement rate of posts promoting religious site were determined using the same formula by the authors Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015). The data are presented in Figure 6. As can be noticed, the engagement rates of the four NTOs with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List are even lower compared to the countries of the defined competitive set for Serbia. In the cases of the NTOs of Spain and Germany, the engagement rates of the posts promoting religious sites were equal to the overall engagement rates, while in case of the NTOs of Italy and France, the engagement rates of the posts promoting religious sites were slightly higher than the overall engagement rates. In addition, it should be noted that the engagement rates of the posts published by the NTO of Serbia were significantly higher compared to the four analysed NTOs.

Conclusion

This paper presented research on the degree of promoting religious tourism sites on Facebook by ten European national tourism organisations. The research presented showed that all the analysed NTOs rarely promoted religious tourism sites on Facebook. Considering the fact that the research included the four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, that is, countries whose tourism offer clearly relies on religious sites, it can be concluded that religious sites are not promoted frequently enough. More specific conclusions can be made about the NTO of Serbia, the main focus of this paper. The

frequency of promoting religious sites on Facebook by the NTO of Serbia was the highest when compared to the frequency of promoting religious sites by the NTOs of all other NTOs. The data showed that the NTO of Serbia promoted religious sites more frequently than the others. In addition, the NTO of Serbia was the organisation that promoted the highest number of different religious sites. Most of the analysed NTOs promoted religious sites relatively equally, i.e. sites were promoted only once, with no particular site standing out, and some of the NTOs used multiple posts to promote religious tourism in general, without mentioning a site in particular. The NTOs of Slovakia and Hungary promoted one religious site more than the others, while only the NTO of Serbia promoted nine religious sites multiple times. Compared to the NTOs of the four European countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the NTO of Serbia again used the highest percentage of their posts to promote religious sites. The only other NTO that promoted religious sites in almost the same percentage of posts was the NTO of Spain.

Posts promoting religious sites were analysed according to the type of content and level of interactivity. The analysis showed that most of the posts promoting religious sites included a photograph, while videos were very rarely used by all of the analysed NTOs. Tourists can get an immediate and a very real sense of where they want to go by viewing videos of their potential tourism destinations (Reino & Hay, 2016), therefore, in cases of all the analysed NTOs, a higher frequency of using videos for promoting religious sites can be recommended. In addition, links to websites were frequently used in order

to provide additional information to the users by almost all the analysed NTOs, except for the NTOs of Spain and Germany. However, those links were rarely leading to the official NTOs' websites. The only NTOs that added links to their official websites in half of the posts promoting religious sites were the NTOs of the Czech Republic and France. The data presented also showed that the posts promoting religious sites rarely asked tourists questions, while they asked them to share their own religious site related content even less frequently. Interactivity is a very important feature of social media which was not available to any extent via traditional media, therefore utilising this feature more often is highly recommended. The only exception was the NTO of Spain, considering the fact that 42.5% of their posts which were dedicated to promoting religious sites were asking users a question. It should be noted that none of the analysed NTOs used a single post in order to ask users to share their own religious site related content.

Finally, the engagement rate of the posts promoting religious tourism was established and compared to the overall engagement rate of the posts published by the NTOs. The data show that the engagement rates of the posts promoting religious sites were higher (or the same in a couple of instances) than the overall engagement rates in the analysed NTOs, highlighting once again the importance of religious sites and the need for their more

frequent promotion. Compared to both NTOs of the defined competitive set and the NTOs of countries with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO list, the NTO of Serbia recorded the highest engagement rates. Considering the fact that social media marketing relies on likes, shares and comments, that is, measurable and quantitative data, according to the data presented, more frequent promotion of religious sites can be advised.

The data presented in this paper can primarily be used in order to provide insight into the importance of religious tourism sites for the countries investigated, especially the ones with the highest number of religious sites on the UNESCO list. Since promotion of religious sites triggers higher engagement with Facebook users than other types of posts published by the analysed NTOs, it can be concluded that tourists are attracted to religious site related content, thus providing valuable guidance for future promotion of the religious sites by the NTOs analysed, as well as those not included in this research. The results of the research presented in this paper are in accordance with the previous research done in the field of promoting religious tourism sites on social media that showed below average and insufficient promotion of religious sites on social media, even though it is confirmed that social media plays an effective role in the development of religious tourism.

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