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Content Analysis as a Research Tool for Marketing, Management and Development Strategies in Tourism

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Abstract

Mature tourism destinations are dealing constantly with increased competition. Therefore, there is a growing need to identify their product's strengths and weaknesses and potential for differentiation. In order to reveal these elements to managers, through the eyes of the visitors, a detailed content analysis of open-ended survey items will be presented. The scope of this paper is to use content analysis as a research tool for studying tourism destinations, in order to support their efforts for a steady flow of arrivals. The open-ended survey items offer the opportunity to the respondents to express, to analyze and expand their opinions and thoughts. The paper is based on a situation analysis, using as a case Corfu Island and the opinions of its major income generating market, British tourists. The large sample size of the survey, n=376, which is stratified, gives a wide variety of answers, used for an expanded analysis. The findings offer implications for managers concerning investment priorities, product differentiation and marketing actions. The limited use of this approach in this kind of destinations makes this study a contribution to the research field.

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Keywords: development strategies; content analysis; open-ended survey items; advantages; disadvantages; improvements

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1. Introduction

Tourism and its related services represent one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors, especially in the Mediterranean area. But the economic, political and social changes around us transform continuously the tourism environment and increase the competition. Therefore, today more than ever the opinions of the visitors play a significant role in the development of the tourism product and services.

Knowledge of consumers' opinions and perceptions is extremely important in determining the success of marketing and development strategies. However, the knowledge of the consumers' judgment has a prerequisite, that of a deeper communication through which they will have the opportunity to express their views freely. In terms of research this can be achieved through the open-end questions that give "space" for a wide variety of answers.

Content analysis is used in the social sciences to analyze various forms of communications, mostly those that are based on textual data. Several tourism researchers employ open ended questions, promotional material, personal interviews etc. and use afterwards content analysis techniques to extract results from the rich textual data and content. Despite the opportunities content analysis can offer by revealing issues associated with the visitors' perceptions, its use in tourism research has been limited. This research paper aims to enrich this research field.

This research paper attempts to offer an effective approach of content analysis, using textual data, typical in tourism studies. It also aims to prove that the proposed approach is connected to the theory and practices of content analysis techniques.

2. Theoretical Background

The methodology of content analysis has been developing since the early 1920s in such areas of scientific inquiry as political science, psychology, and communications; it was also adopted in tourism research, though to a lesser extent (Stepchenkova et al, 2009).

Content analysis is a research methodology which examines textual data for patterns and structures, singles out the key features to which researchers want to pay attention, develops categories, and aggregates them into perceptible constructs in order to seize text meaning (Gray and Densten 1998, Shoemaker and Reese 1996).

Holsti (1969) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.

It is "a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision, and generality, what is said on a given subject in a given place at a given time" (Lasswell, Lerner and Pool, 1952, p. 34). Berelson (1952, p. 18) summarized content analysis as a "research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." Weber (1990, p. 9) described content analysis as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text." This method allows the systematic analysis of text in order to conceptualize and identify important features of a given concept (Billore et al, 2013)

There are two methods for content analysis in social sciences: qualitative and quantitative. The former term refers to nonstatistical and exploratory methods, which involve inductive reasoning (Berg 1995), while the latter term refers to methods that are capable of providing statistical inferences from text data. Content analysis as a method of gathering information requires correct codifying of qualitative and quantitative information into pre-defined categories in order to derive patterns in the analysis and reporting of information (Thia and Ross, 2011).

Content analysis is capable of capturing a richer sense of concepts within the data due to its qualitative basis and, at the same time, can be subjected to quantitative data-analysis techniques (Insch and Moore, 1997).

A central idea of quantitative content analysis is that a lot of words in a text can be classified into much fewer content groups or categories. The methodology of extracting content categories from the text, counting their occurrences in the sampled text blocks, and analyzing associations between categories using the frequency matrix was developed by the mid-20th century, primarily by a group of Harvard researchers, (Roberts, 2000).

George (1959), Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 32) were critical on this approach and argued that the process of reducing large volumes of text to quantitative data "does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes, since texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition." Actually, this analysis assumes that "what an author says is what he means" (Pool 1959, p. 4).

Newbold, Boyd- Barrett, and Van Den Bulck (2002, p. 80) agree that "there is no simple relationship between media texts and their impact, and it would be too simplistic to base decisions in this regard on mere figures obtained from a statistical content analysis."

However, despite its limitations, quantitative content analysis has long been employed in social studies due to its clear methodological reasoning based on the assumption that the most frequent theme in the text is the most important, as well as to the ability to incorporate such scientific methods as "*a priori* design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing" (Neuendorf 2002, p. 10).

There are two main traditions in the quantitative content- analysis research delineated by Weber (1983): substitution model and correlational model. In the substitution tradition, text is analyzed with a priori established categories that are understood as "a group of words with *similar* meaning and/or connotations" (Weber 1983, p. 140). For example, the words *ice*, *snow*, and *igloo* all represent the same idea of cold and, thus, can be united under one category of "cold" (Hogenraad, McKenzie and Peladeau, 2003).

The correlational model, on the opposite, discerns categories from the text analyzed. In this tradition, categories are "groups of words with *different* meaning or connotations that taken together refer to some theme or issue" (Weber 1983, p. 140). These themes are extracted from the matrix of word frequencies by means of factor analysis or other data-reduction technique. The approach was first developed in the late 1950s to early 1960s almost simultaneously in areas of computerized data search, linguistics, and political science (Iker, 1974);

2.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of the method

According to Duriau et al (2007) content analysis advocates have noticed several advantages of this method over competing choices. Foremost to management research, content analysis provides a replicable methodology to access deep individual or collective structures such as values, intentions, attitudes and cognitions. Another key element noted is the flexibility of the method.

Below some of the key strengths of this method, as well as its main weaknesses are listed:

Strengths
- Can be applied to examine any written document, as well as pictures, videos, and situations
- Widely used and understood
- Can help decipher trends in groups or individuals
- It is inexpensive, and can be easily repeated if problems arise
- It is unobtrusive and does not necessarily require contact with people
- Useful for analyzing archival material
- Establishing reliability is easy and straightforward
- Of all the research methods, content analysis scores highest with regard to ease of replication. Usually the materials can be made available for others to use.

Weaknesses
- Content analysis is a purely descriptive method. It describes what is there, but may not reveal the underlying motives for the observed pattern ('what' but not 'why').
- The analysis is limited by availability of material.

3. Objectives of the Study

This research paper aims:
1. To indicate the destinations advantages, disadvantages and suggestions for improvements as perceived and proposed by its main target market.
2. To comparatively examine the advantages, disadvantages and suggestions for improvements, in order to build a common context of broader categories which helps immediate correlations for all three categories
3. To offer implications for marketing, management and development strategies.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research design and survey sites

In order to achieve the targets of the study, it was necessary to carry out primary quantitative research. The implementation of the research and the collection of the primary data was decided to take place in the tourism destination of Corfu island. This destination is an established Mediterranean destination and could be considered as a miniature of Greek tourism. Also, it is a traditional destination for the British target market. So, the nationality of the sampling population was decided to be British, since they represent one of the two basic target markets of Corfu and Greece in general.

4.2. Sampling and data collection

The study needed a representative sample from the population of the island's main tourism generating country. The sample is stratified. Therefore, is probability sample and more representative. Specifically, the island is divided into three areas: North, Central and South. Each area has every category of accommodation (hotels, villas, apartments, rooms to let). The three areas were considered as strata.

The members of the sample were chosen by random sampling on all three strata. Special attention was given in order to have responses from all hotel categories and other accommodation types (apartments, villas etc.) from all the parts of the island. The respondents were approached at their place of accommodation, therefore ensuring that the three areas of the island and all types of accommodation were represented.

4.3. Sample size

The final sample size obtained was 376 British tourists/first time visitors. This sample size (n=376) gives a statistical error (e ̃ 5%).
Level of significance a=0,05
Level of confidence 95%
This sample size and statistical error could permit the generalisation of the results.

4.4 Profile and description of the sample

Female respondents represented 57%, or 216 persons, male respondents represented 43%, or 160 persons out of a total of 376. Also, 44% of the sample is between the ages of 35 and 54 years. The other age categories are represented with the percentages of 27% for the under 34 age group and 29% for the 55+ group. The income brackets ">£20.000" and "£20.000 - £40.000" are represented with 36% and 41% respectively. Their percentages are increased compared to the income bracket of "£40.000+" that is only 23%.

4.5. Questionnaire design and content

The questionnaire was self administrated. It comprised closed-end and open-end questions. The closed-end questions concerned the demographic data. The open-end questions asked for the respondents opinions about advantages, disadvantages and suggestions for improvements.

4.6 Methodology

This study is based on the analysis of open-end questions. These types of questions have as a target to provoke more detailed answers. In contrast to the closed-end questions they do not limit the respondent to a preselected range of short answers.

Their objective is to collect a variety of detailed answers in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject under research, in this case the destination of Corfu. The purpose of these questions is to reveal unexpected dimensions on the issue under research. Of course, occasionally there is the possibility of gathering commonplace and stereotypical answers. The issues under survey with the open-end questions concern the respondents' opinions about advantages, disadvantages and improvements of this specific destination.

The nature of the open-end questions results to a multitude of distinctive answers. Therefore, the first step of the process is to classify similar primary answers into broader categories in order to facilitate the convergence of the

basic points of the answers. The second step concerns the analysis of the new categories.

Another characteristic of the open-end questions is that the number of the given answers exceeds the number of respondents. This is expected since every respondent can give more than one answer. Based on this the percentages of the answers can be calculated on two bases: a) on the basis of the number of the answers, b) on the basis of the number of the respondents. Therefore, concerning (a) the percentage of a specific answer depends on the total number of the answers per respondent, while for (b) it depends on the frequency of mentions from the respondents.

The present analysis is based on the level of the broader categories which result from the contribution of the similar answers. Therefore, every resulting broader category is explored in two ways: a) based on their percentage among the total answers, b) based on the numbers of the respondents who mention this category. In this case we are not interested in the number of the primary answers per respondent. One respondent who mentions more than one answers on the same category counts exactly like another respondent that mentions only one answer for this category.

5. Findings

5.1 Advantages, disadvantages and improvements' proposals

There is an attempt to evaluate Corfu, as a tourism destination, based on the experience acquired by the respondents by the end of the visit. This experience is expressed by the open-end questions answered before the respondents' departure from the island. Additionally, their observations and suggestions concerning the improvement of the supply were asked.

The sorting of the answers followed the same approach for the three questions in order to build a common context of broader categories which helps immediate comparisons for the bundle advantages/disadvantages/improvements.

This context consists of 15 broader categories which show different intensity for every question. Therefore, the category "sea" is mentioned much more as an advantage than a disadvantage, while the opposite happens for the "infrastructure". The category "infrastructure" was the one that was mentioned much more in the disadvantages and in the areas of improvement. Therefore, it was decided to be divided in subcategories. Finally the overwhelming majority of the respondents answers the questions for the advantages while this is not the case for the other two questions where the percentage of n/a (do not know) is quite high.

5.2. Advantages

From the 376 respondents that answered this question resulted 1.066 answers, meaning an average of 2,8 answers per respondent. The total of the distinct answers is 54 which are incorporated into 14 broader categories (table 1). The "climate", the "people" and the "natural beauty" of the island rise as the biggest advantages and are mentioned at around 40% of all responses. The respondents demonstrate their appreciation of these elements by using expressions like, "warm weather", "good climate", "lush vegetation", "pretty island", "many trees", "nice people", "everyone speaks foreign languages" etc. Other variables such us "sea & beaches" are mentioned by one out of four respondents (25%) and represent the next more popular element. Variables such as "food", "sense of tranquillity", "Corfu city & culture" and the range of "activities" attract between 15% and 20% of the respondents' answers each. However, only 10% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction for the island "infrastructure" that included variables such as "accommodation", "transports and road network" and "prices". An additional advantage mentioned is the close proximity of the island to Britain (9%).

Table 1: Sectors where Corfu displays advantages as a tourism destination

	? . Percentage of total respondents (376)	? . Percentage on total responses (answers) (1066)
Sea & beaches	26,6%	10,3%
Climate conditions	45,2%	16,8%
natural beauty	39,6%	16,7%
corfu city & culture	10,9%	3,9%
People	43,1%	15,9%
Food	15,7%	5,9%
sense of tranquillity	18,4%	7,4%

proximity to Britain	9,0%		3,4%	
Infrastracture	10,9%		4,1%	
transports		3,7%		1,3%
other		7,4%		2,8%
Activities	15,4%		6,1%	
accommodation	4,8%		1,9%	
prices	9,3%		3,4%	
safety	1,3%		,5%	
other	3,5%		1,3%	
DK/DA	2,4%		,8%	
Average answers per respondent =1066 / 376=2,83				

5.3. Disadvantages

From the 376 respondents that answered this question resulted 578 answers, meaning an average of 1,5 answers per respondent. The total of the distinct answers is 92 which are incorporated into 14 broader categories (table 2). Without any doubt the main disadvantage, as indicated by 40% of the respondents is "infrastructure". The main points mentioned are the road network (20%), the pavements (8%) and the local transportation (8,5%). The respondents chose expressions such as "small airport", "small roads", "bumpy roads", "lack of parking", "lack of public toilets", "not good drainage system" to demonstrate their discontent. Smaller percentages are referring to issues such as "cleanliness", "prices" and "loss of tradition".

The fact that the negative answers are considerably less than the positive ones is an indication of the general satisfaction from the visit. However, the high percentage of the negative comments concerning infrastructure must be the focus of the authorities' concern.

Table 2: Sectors where Corfu displays disadvantages as a tourism destination

	? . Percentage of total respondents (376)		? . Percentage on total responses (answers) (578)	
Sea & beaches	10,6%		7,1%	
climate	6,1%		4,0%	
natural beauty	,3%		,2%	
corfu city & culture	7,2%		5,9%	
people	3,7%		2,4%	
food	1,1%		,7%	
sense of tranquillity	5,3%		3,5%	
infrastracture	40,2%		39,4%	
roads		21,3%		16,3%
pedestrian facilities		8,8%		5,9%
tourist information		1,9%		1,4%
transports		8,5%		5,7%
drainage system		4,8%		3,1%
airport		2,1%		1,6%
shopping facilities		,5%		,3%
other		7,4%		5,2%
activities	5,9%		4,3%	
accomodation	3,5%		2,2%	
prices	6,6%		4,5%	
cleanliness	6,6%		5,5%	
safety	,8%		,5%	
other	3,2%		2,1%	
n/a	27,1%		17,6%	
Average answers per respondent = 578 / 376=1,5				
Average answers per respondent (excluding n/a)=476 / 274 = 1,7				

5.4. Improvements

From the 376 respondents, over 31% elected not to answer this question. From the remaining percentage (69%) resulted 416 answers, meaning an average of 1,6 answers per respondent. From the answers of the remaining 69%

resulted 76 distinct proposals. In accordance to the issues mentioned as "disadvantages" the main suggestions concern "infrastructure". The percentages are similar for both the general and specific categories.

　　The main points mentioned are the need to improve the road network (21%), the pavements (10%) and the local transportation (10%). It is interesting to mention that although the disadvantage "drainage system" is mentioned by only 5% of the respondents when it comes to suggestions for improvements it receives 10% of the answers. Similar disproportionate answers occur with the variable of "cleanliness", while only 6,6% mentions it as a disadvantage, 13% suggest the need for improvement. Another important issue concerns the preservation of the local culture and character, mostly through the renovation of historical buildings and the promotion of the cultural elements. Last but not least they mention the need for a broader range of activities and to place restrictions to the individuals that disturb the "sense of tranquility" offered by the island, namely too many tourist shops and "loud" tourists.

Table 3: Suggestions for improvements of Corfu as a tourism destination

	? . Percentage of total respondents (376)		? . Percentage on total responses (answers) (578)	
natural beauty	,3%		,2%	
corfu city & culture	8,0%		6,0%	
people	1,3%		,9%	
food	1,1%		,8%	
sense of tranquillity	2,4%		1,7%	
infrastracture	46,0%		47,7%	
roads		21,3%		17,9%
pedestrian facilities		10,4%		8,8%
tourist information		2,7%		2,3%
transports		9,8%		7,3%
drainage system		10,1%		7,1%
airport		2,7%		1,9%
shopping facilities		,8%		,6%
other		2,7%		1,9%
activities	3,5%		2,6%	
accomodation	2,7%		1,9%	
prices	2,4%		1,7%	
cleanliness	13,6%		11,3%	
safety	1,1%		,8%	
other	3,7%		2,6%	
n/a	30,9%		21,8%	

Average answers per respondent = 532 / 376=1,4
Average answers per respondent (excluding n/a)=416 / 260 = 1,6

6. Content Analysis' Results and Conclusions

　　From the content analysis a lot of interesting findings were revealed. Some of them were unexpected in terms of percentages but also in terms of intensity. Specifically:

ᴀ　The friendliness of the local population proved to be an unexpected strength since 43,1% of the respondents comment so positively on this issue.

ᴀ　The climate conditions of the island are considered another strong element since 45,2% of the respondents believe that it constitutes an advantage.

ᴀ　The natural beauty of the island along with the beauty of Corfu town and its cultural environment are mentioned as an advantage from 50% of the respondents.

ᴀ　The beaches represent a strong advantage for the island, however there are complaints regarding their pollution.

ᴀ　Visitors are skeptical on the matter of cultural heritage and its preservation. They are concerned about the distortion of the island's identity due to the overdevelopment of the tourism sector.

ᴀ　The main weakness of the destination concerns its infrastructure. The complaints focus on the road network, specifically the ill maintained surface and the lack of signage and street lights. Complaints are also expressed about the lack of pavements and the local transportation. The drainage appears as one more issue that demands attention.

A   Even though the issue of cleanliness does not gather many comments as a disadvantage, the intensity with which it appears in the suggestions for improvement should be a cause for concern.

The fact that the visitors showed greater response in answers about the advantages in comparison with those about disadvantages and improvements could be an indication of their general satisfaction from their chosen vacation destination. Additionally, it could mean that the specific destination has many positive elements and potential to attract several target segments.

The following table (table 4) summarizes the sectors of the main advantages, disadvantages and improvements as indicated by the content analysis.

Table 4: Sectors of main advantages, disadvantages and suggestions of improvements of Corfu as a tourism destination

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Improvements
Sea & beaches	26,6%	10,6%	
Climate conditions	45,2%	6,1%	
natural beauty	39,6%	,3%	3%
corfu city & culture	10,9%	7,2%	8,0%
people	43,1%	3,7%	1,3%
food	15,7%	1,1%	1,1%
sense of tranquillity	18,4%	5,3%	2,4%
infrastructure	10,9%	40,2%	46,0%
roads		21,3%	21,3%
pedestrian facilities		8,8%	10,4%
tourist information		1,9%	2,7%
transports	3,7%	8,5%	9,8%
drainage system		4,8%	10,1%
airport		2,1%	2,7%
shopping facilities		,5%	,8%
other	7,4%	7,4%	2,7%
activities	15,4%	5,9%	3,5%
accommodation	4,8%	3,5%	2,7%
prices	9,3%	6,6%	2,4%
cleanliness		6,6%	13,6%
safety	1,3%	,8%	1,1%
other	3,5%	3,2%	3,7%
n/a	2,4%	27,1%	30,9%

7. Implications for Marketing Management and Development Strategies

The findings of this study could form the basis for a series of proposals and suggestions on the design and implementation of tourism development strategies and diversification of the tourism product and also design of realistic and effective promotional procedures. Specifically:

1. Design a set of projects in infrastructure improvement characterized by selecting criteria, including:
• Primary response in those parts of the tourism experience which find the destination wanting in terms of infrastructure (mostly road and pedestrian transportation).
• Linking varying projects for the upgrade and protection of the resources of regional destinations.
• Ensure synergies and cooperation between the private and public sector.

2. Planning actions for maintenance and enhancement of cultural resources which will be characterized by the following sequential steps:
• Inventory of cultural resources by area
• Assessment of the importance of all cultural resources by specialists in order to determine their uniqueness and the measure of their attractiveness
• Cartographic display and promotion in the media (brochures, travel guides, advertising in the press, television, etc.)

3. Design a grid of projects and actions, characterized by immediate results, to enhance the natural environment that should include the following:

• Immediate actions to clean coasts and beaches
• Incorporation of areas in environmental protection and conservation programs
• Application and use of information systems to control and monitor the environmental quality
• Communication of the above actions to the public

4. Capitalize on corrective actions and strengths, by converting them into promoted advantages that will lead to the creation of a modern and competitive brand identity. Specifically:
• Considering that the local population has been proven to be a major component of the positive image of the destination under consideration, it could also be a basic element of the destination branding, identity and diversity.
• Focus on product differentiation that can be achieved through the selection of those characteristics that emerged as "strong elements" of supply, meaning those elements that make a difference such as the climate, the natural beauty and cultural elements.

5. Creation of a basis for destination image dimensions and variables by discovering key words or image variables.
• A number of previous studies which employed sorting and categorization techniques to identify the frequencies of certain concepts, words, or people in destination promotional materials treated the most frequent ones as variables, or dimensions, of the destination-image construct (Andsager and Drzewiecka 2002, Dann 1988, 1996, MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997, Ryan and Cave 2005). These words are often referred to as key words, or image variables.
• Image is conceived as a representation of the tourism destination in the individual's mind and this was achieved through this research approach.

6. Planning and developing actual marketing campaigns that focus on promoting the features of product differentiation.
• Planning public relations programs focused on the steady promotion and communication of corrective actions to all stakeholders in order to create and maintain relations of mutual understanding and goodwill between all stakeholders in the tourism process and customer markets. Special attention must be given to tour-operators and travel agencies which deal with our customers, since it is a general observation that they maintain their stronghold on the purchase decision.

    The content analysis conducted in this research paper revealed not only strong advantages but also advantages that can be characterized as sustainable and competitive (the already existing friendly and hospitable population, the climate, the natural beauty and cultural elements of the island in general and Corfu town in particular). These strengths are unique to the island and cannot be replicated in a different destination. Especially the element of the local population is known, by the literature, that can create strong emotional bonds with the visitors and create loyal clientele (Chatzigeorgiou et al, 2009).
    From a marketing management perspective this study revealed visitors' opinions which helped to understand better their experience in relation to the strengths, weaknesses and improvements of the destination under study. Therefore, this study offered guidelines for investment priorities, branding issues, promotional strategies and focus for further research.
    From a methodological approach this study defined a methodology based on content analysis, that DMOs could use to assess visitors' perceptions of their product in the market place.

8. Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

    This research is limited to one market segment only. More testing, extended to several target markets is desirable in order to replicate and verify the functionality of the approach. Also, the combination of the quantitative with qualitative approach in the context of content analysis is suggested for future studies in order to compare and enrich the findings.

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