



PROMOTION OF THE TOURIST PRODUCT USING PRESENTATION ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE FUNCTION OF IMPROVING THE OFFER OF THE CITY OF KOTOR

Milena Bogdanović^{1*},
Nikica Radović²

¹Ph.D. Student,
Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

²Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

The significance of utilizing the Internet and social media networks for promoting tourist destinations and presenting tourist products on these platforms, which are nowadays central sources of information, is immense. In addition to becoming easily available, they are both a cheap and powerful tool through which information and target market can be reached very quickly and easily, compared to the traditional marketing tools. Their application is not constrained by time or location, either on the supply side or the demand side. At the same time, they enable social interaction of the users, in which social media networks are leading, because they provide space for the exchange of opinions, experiences, content, as well as for personal contact in real time, which ultimately increases overall satisfaction with a tourist product or service. Destination management organizations and providers of tourist services, leverage the Internet and social media networks to disseminate basic information about their offerings. Since this is often a tourist's first encounter with a destination, it is crucial that the presentation features attractive and high-quality content, serving as an additional incentive for a visit. The aim of this research is to examine the extent to which local self-government and cultural institutions from the area of Kotor use modern information and communication technologies, especially the Internet and social media networks, for the purpose of promoting the overall tourist product. In this regard, the analysis of the content presented on the official websites and social network profiles of certain institutions of Kotor was conducted. The results of the research indicate that promotion on these digital channels is undervalued, as evidenced by a lack of information, limited content, and an inadequate overall visual experience.

Keywords:

internet, social media, Kotor, promotion, tourist product.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet and social networks, in today's era of globalization and digitalization, represent the most widespread and accessible means of information and communication worldwide. In addition to information and communication, they play a significant role in the promotion and sales of products and services, as well as in creating an image and gaining a reputation in any market, especially in the tourist market.

The turning point in the increase in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) appears to have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of circumstances that encouraged these changes.

Correspondence:
Milena Bogdanović

e-mail:
milena.bogdanovic.23@singidunum.ac.rs



This is supported by the fact that at the end of 2023, almost 5.4 billion people, i.e. 67% of the world's population, used the Internet (ITU, 2024), out of which as many as 5.07 billion people, i.e. 62.6% of the world's population, used the same technology including social networks simultaneously (Petrosyan and STATISTA, 2024). Comparatively, in 2018, the number of Internet users was 3.7 billion, representing 49% of the global population. This shows significant growth of nearly 2 billion users in just five years (ITU, 2024). This growth has particularly affected tourism, because their expansion and rapid development led to changes in the functioning of the tourist market on a global level. New destinations are now easily discovered and positioned on the market much faster than before, so the competition has increased significantly. There have been significant changes in the needs, interests and especially the possibilities of a modern tourist, who now uses ICT in all stages of the trip: before, during and after the trip (Knežević *et al.*, 2017), because their application and use are no longer limited by time or place, neither on the supply side nor on the demand side. Modern consumer no longer accepts the limitations in the process of finding out information, but rather enjoys broad, immediate access to all relevant data. This implies not only specific information about the product or service, but also previous user-experiences, the possibility of exchanging opinions and content, and also a certain interaction with service providers. On the other hand, sellers and service providers now have a vast platform for presenting their offerings as well as marketing and promoting products and services to target markets, in a faster, easier and cheaper way than before.

The current Tourism Development Strategy of Montenegro for the period 2022-2025 recognizes the importance of introducing innovations in the field of information technologies as essential for the development of tourism, and among other things, emphasizes the importance of the tourist product digitalization for the purposes of promoting and positioning destinations in the new markets, as well as for the improvement of their positions on already existing markets through marketing quality content on digital communication channels. In this regard, a special strategic operational goal refers to destination marketing and branding, which involves presenting the destination in a new, different way and in accordance with trends, using integrated marketing communications (Ministarstvo ekonomskog razvoja, 2022). The research objective is to assess the extent to which local public institutions and cultural entities in the municipality of Kotor prioritize showcasing their tourism offerings online and through social media, capitalizing on the promotional advantages of these platforms. Accordingly, this study will analyze the websites and social media content from five public institutions of local self-government and culture from Kotor: Municipality of Kotor, Tourism Organisation of Kotor, PI Cultural Center "Nikola Đurković" Kotor, Maritime Museum of Montenegro Kotor and MPI Museum of Kotor.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of the Internet has caused a revolution in most branches of business. Many studies indicate that perhaps the most significant changes have occurred in tourism, as the operations of tourist companies and the functioning of the tourist market in general have changed fundamentally, with the advent of new communication technologies that now generate new business principles. This was particularly reflected in the approach to the application of marketing activities and especially in advertising. Traditional methods of advertising are no longer so applicable, given the changes in consumer behavior that are reflected in their needs, opportunities and interests, i.e. in the increase of their power on the market, the provided possibility of choice but also the exchange of information and experiences, both with sellers and with other users. The consumer uses IKT, primarily for information and communication, which are in constant correlation. In this regard, advertising (promotion) is a form of communication between the seller and the consumer, with the aim of providing accurate information and establishing two-way communication in order to encourage sales and to satisfy needs on the one hand and to make a profit on the other (Popesku and Gajić, 2020).

The Internet and social media represent digital interactive media: the Internet as a global platform for accessing information, various databases and for establishing communication between the seller and the buyer, and social media as advanced platforms for two-way communication that enable the target group not only to search for information but also to publish it, share, exchange and create new one based on experience. In this regard, there are the following types of social media: search websites (e.g. Google, Wikipedia, etc.), social networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content sharing media (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo, Pinterest) and internet forums and communities (Arens and Weingold, 2018) (Gajić, 2019).



The importance of the Internet for tourism is primarily reflected in its 24/7 availability, allowing continuous access from anywhere in the world. It also supports global transactions and reservations, sales of tourist services (e.g. admission tickets, airline tickets, accommodation, etc.), contains detailed information on prices and availability (which is updated every couple of seconds), generates customer information that is stored in a database which is later used for analysis purposes of creating new offers, but also contains multimedia content as an additional incentive for purchasing the service (Middleton *et al.*, 2009).

The role of promotion in tourism is particularly expressed in the decision-making process of the modern tourist when purchasing a product or requesting a service, who now uses ICT in all phases of the trip: before the trip, during the trip and after the trip. In this regard, in the travel-planning phase, the majority of the time is spent on researching data and gathering information about the availability of the destination, available contents, pricing policy and previous user-experience (Knežević *et al.*, 2017). A key role in this phase is played by the websites (as the starting point of any research) of the potential destination - destination management organizations and cultural institutions (museums, galleries, tourist sites). In today's world, a destination's online presence is not only important but essential, as it represents the first point of contact between a potential tourist and the destination. This interaction creates an impression that can motivate a visit. Consequently, the website must be easy to use, visually attractive and, above all, contain useful information and links to other related important websites (Kotler *et al.*, 2017). They should also be available in multiple languages and connected to social media platforms, which significantly influences the desire to visit a particular destination. Social networks function on the principle of posting posts, in the form of text, images, videos and sharing content. The mentioned tools can have a positive effect on the tourist and be an incentive for additional searches for information in this phase of a trip (Minazzi, 2015) (Čamilović, 2018). The performance of social networks is set in such a way that up-to-date and constant interaction is necessary, all with the aim of better visibility and presentation of content to end-users. Both websites and social networks have the possibility of using various tools for, above all, improving the position on search engines and better visibility of pages and posts to a significant extent, if the possibility of SEO optimization (Search Engine Optimization) and Facebook ads manager functions are used, which represent paid types of advertising on the Internet and social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.).

The intensive use of ICT is noticeable both during and after the trip. During the trip, tourists primarily use mobile devices to search for additional information about local sites and points of interest. Also, various mobile applications are used with the aim to reduce search time, make the stay easier by providing special and useful information, as well as reduce costs during the trip itself (e.g. serving as a substitute for a tourist guide), but also share current impressions of the destination (e.g. photos, videos, stories, etc.) on social networks. After the trip, the tourist continues to share the acquired impressions, but also to evaluate the quality of the content and all segments of the trip, especially through social networks and certain sites for experience sharing. Therefore, it is essential that websites are optimized for mobile devices, but also that the destination management organizations, i.e. cultural institutions, think about improving their offer in the direction of developing specific mobile applications in the places where this is possible and applicable (Čamilović, 2018).

All of the above represents a form of promotion which greatly affects the overall image of the destination. In general, both platforms play a role in creating the image of a destination and creating its reputation on the tourist market (Čamilović, 2018). Regardless of whether the consumer will make a positive decision to purchase the service, the ultimate goal of the entire process of communication with consumers is to influence their attitudes and behaviors in all the stages of the journey (Popesku and Gajić, 2020).

Finally, it is worth noting data on the most-used communication channels between September and November 2023. During this period, the most popular platform globally was Google with an astonishing average of 175 billion visits per month. It was followed by YouTube with 113 billion visits, and the social network Facebook, with an average of 18.1 billion monthly visits (Bianchi and STATISTA, 2024). Also, research on daily Internet usage reveals that the average individual spends approximately 151 minutes (2 hours and 31 minutes) per day on Internet activities (Dixon and STATISTA, 2024).



METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this research was to determine the extent to which local public institutions in the municipality of Kotor utilize modern information technologies, including the Internet and social networks, to promote and present the destination's tourism product globally. Accordingly, a study was conducted among five relevant institutions from the municipality of Kotor, one of which has a management role in the destination and another that plays a role in implementing development policies within its scope. These institutions include: the Municipality of Kotor, the Tourism Organization of Kotor, the PI Cultural center "Nikola Đurković" Kotor, the Maritime Museum of Montenegro, and the MPI Museum of Kotor. The research was conducted in two phases, from July 29th to August 15th.

In the first (main) phase of the research, the focus was on identifying how many institutions have an official website and social media accounts, how engaged they were on these platforms, the type of content they posted and whether they offered online services. In the second (additional) phase of the research, the study examined whether these five institutions monitor websites and social media visits to optimize their content and whether they use paid advertising to increase visibility. The research methodology involved data collection and analysis through synthesis and descriptive methods, utilizing information from websites and social media accounts of the institutions, as well as additional questionnaire conducted among the aforementioned institutions.

The research is guided by the following question: Does the implementation of promotional activities, in the form of presentation and advertising on the Internet and social networks, improve the city's offerings and enhance overall tourist satisfaction?

RESULTS

At the outset, it was determined that all five institutions have a website and active user accounts on several social networks. Content posting varies in quantity and quality, depending on the institution and the platform on which it is posted. Among social networks, Facebook and Instagram are the most widely used, while YouTube, Tik Tok and the LinkedIn business network are used to a lesser extent. Most pages have thousands of followers, especially the Tourism Organization of Kotor. However, not all institutions monitor visits or analyze their audience engagement. Below is an analysis of the website and social network accounts, with all data collected through this research presented for each institution individually.

The Municipality of Kotor – This institution was included in the study due to its dual role as the administrative authority of the city and as the founding body for the Tourism Organization, the Cultural Center and the MPI Museums of Kotor. When visiting the website through an Internet browser, the site prominently lists the name "Kotor" at the very top, above references to all the aforementioned institutions. This is not unusual, even though it is an administrative domain, as the site also provides information about the city, various events, and contact details for cultural institutions. The website features a section with basic information about the city in several primary languages, including English. Furthermore, the Municipality disseminates information across four social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok and YouTube. However, only the Facebook and Instagram accounts are updated regularly, with daily posts featuring concise text and audiovisual content or multimedia shared from various sources. The account attracts thousands of followers, especially the Tourism Organization's accounts (Table 1). According to the additional survey conducted in this research, it was found that the institution employs a person to manage its website and accounts on social networks, to maintain a database of visits to them and also to use the services of paid online advertising, however only on social networks (Table 2).

Tourism Organization Kotor - This is a destination management organization of the municipality of Kotor. The conducted research determined that for the purposes of presentation of their activities and in general for the presentation of the destination's offer, they use both the website and social networks. Search engine results for the keyword "Kotor" show that the website of this organization is listed only after several privately sponsored websites and the Municipality of Kotor's website which means that they are not currently using paid search engine advertising. However, during the observed research period, it became apparent that the website was undergoing a redesign and had not been updated for over a year, which might explain the lack



of advertised presence on search engines. The current website's homepage features videos highlighting key city attractions and activities, but without any audio coverage. Only selected activities offer details about usage, timing or location. It is also noted that there is no direct purchase link for event tickets, nor are services available in languages other than English. The extent of use of social networks is higher and better compared to the website, so audiovisual content, information about events and information about the activities carried out by the organization can be seen on the Facebook profile almost every day. As can be seen in Table 1, this profile is followed by more than 12,000 thousand people, making it the most-followed public institution account in the municipality of Kotor on this platform. The organization also promotes its content on social networks such as Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. Content is updated daily in the form of time-limited "story" announcements, while other announcements, created in the form of short videos showcasing attractions or events, often without accompanying text, are posted less frequently. The Instagram account has an impressive following of 21,000 thousand people, representing the largest municipality-based account on the Instagram social network. Additionally, the number of followers on other social networks is detailed in Table 1. Through extensive survey research, it was found that the organization has a separate sector that deals with destination marketing which handles the collection and analysis of the site visit database, as well as that they take advantage of paid advertising on the Internet (this service is currently inactive) and social networks. These results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Presence on Social Networks of Institutions / Organizations

	FACEBOOK		INSTAGRAM		YOUTUBE	TIK TOK	LINKEDIN
	page like	page followers	page followers	posts	subscribers	followers	followers
MUNICIPALITY OF KOTOR	6,413	7,453	4,819	70	62	81	/
TOURISM ORGANISATION OF KOTOR	9,312	12,338	21,000	718	/	/	220
CULTURAL CENTER	4,621	4,999	3,138	1,828	83	/	/
MARITIME MUSEUM	543	612	1,003	161	/	/	/
MPI MUSEUMS	1,656	1.656	2,385	530	/	/	/

Source: Author's Work

PI Cultural Center "Nikola Đurković" Kotor - the activity of the institution basically includes organizing cultural and art events, theater performances, festivals, traditional manifestations, literary evenings, art exhibitions and other cultural contents. Research found that the organization has a website but also profiles on social networks. However, the website hasn't been updated for a long time, so it doesn't provide timely information about current programs and events. It is noticeable that this web page has a more modern look, however, the contents are not adequately placed and there are difficulties in the page functionality. In this regard, in order to reach users of the abovementioned content offered by the institution, social networks Facebook and Instagram are mostly used as a means of information. The number of followers is high on both networks, which can be concluded from Table 1. Announcements are posted on a daily basis, mostly in the form of photos with accompanying texts or sharing content from related institutions of the city. It is important to note that the Cultural Center does not provide the option of online ticket purchase for its events, however, they give the option to book tickets by calling their official phone number. On the basis of the conducted additional survey research, it was determined that the institution has a special sector that deals with marketing and maintaining a website and profile on social networks, however, it does not maintain a database of visits on the mentioned platforms and does not use the possibility of paid advertising on any platform.



Table 2. Short Questionnaire about Digital Marketing in Institutions of Kotor Municipality

	MUNICIPALITY OF KOTOR	TOURISM ORGANISATION	CULTURAL CENTER	MARITIME MUSEUM	MPI MUSE-UMS
1. Marketing sector?	✓	✓	✓	×	×
2. Web site and social network administrator?	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
3. Active web page?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Active profiles on social net-works?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Which social networks are active?	FB, IG, TT, YT	FB, IG, LINK, YT	FB, IG, YT	FB, IG	FB, IG
6. Records of visits to the website or social networks and a data-base of the same?	✓ ^{1*}	✓	×	×	✓ [*]

Source: Author's Work¹

The Maritime Museum of Montenegro Kotor - It is a treasury of rich cultural heritage from the Boka Kotorska area that is more than 120 years old, in addition to numerous cultural and historical monuments for which the city is famous, is a must-see place to visit for lovers of history and culture. The museum exhibits include a bronze table in relief, old geographical maps and plans, paintings by prominent painters, weapons and tools, ship models, historical records and other objects and testimonies of the history of the people of Boka Kotorska. Like the aforementioned institutions, the Maritime Museum also has a website and accounts on social networks. The website has a modern look, with the presentation of all content in the form of photos with accompanying text. It contains a section that offers the possibility of a virtual visit to the museum and also several online photo exhibitions. Opening hours information is provided but not updated and ticket price information is also provided, however, also without the possibility of online purchase. The social networks Facebook and Instagram, which they use to interact with visitors, are active, but with a small number of followers, the smallest of all examined institutions as can be seen in Table 1. Announcements are posted every couple of days, in the form of photos with accompanying text, most often about interesting things from the history of the people from these areas whose heritage is preserved in the museum. Additional survey research established that the Maritime Museum does not have a marketing sector, but on the other hand, they hire an agency that administers social networks and uploads content on their behalf. It was also established that the institution does not use the possibility of paid advertising on any online platform.

MPI Museums – This is a group of the city's cultural institutions that include museums and galleries, spread over several locations in the municipality of Kotor. These institutions preserve testimonies of prehistoric and ancient times, archaeological sites, mosaics and works of art from these areas. It is the only public institution in the area of Kotor whose content is available in several foreign languages. The website has a modern look, it is user-friendly and provides all the necessary information about the content it offers. Opening hours and ticket prices are clearly indicated, however, this institution does not offer the option to buy tickets online. Facebook and Instagram are the only social networks used to present their content, primarily through short posts that combine text and photos, with special emphasis on promoting the "Let's Take Cultural Heritage" campaign. The campaign highlights the promotion of souvenirs that the institution makes and sells, which are replicas of jewelry and decorative items inspired by the exhibits and the cultural heritage of Kotor. Buying these souvenirs is only possible in institutions and localities, meaning that online purchases are not available. Additional survey research found that the institution uses the option of paid advertising on social networks, however, it does not use this option for the Internet platform.

¹ The institution uses the possibility of paid advertising only on social networks



CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research concludes that all the institutions analyzed use websites and social networks (primarily Facebook and Instagram) to present their content, but to an insufficient extent. This is reflected mainly in the quality and quantity of posts and the planned information, which, in some cases, are not clear or adequately presented on the website. Additionally, the audience that does not speak English is not being reached. It is particularly noticeable that the website of the key institution for presenting the city of Kotor, Tourism Organization, is still under construction. Therefore, it doesn't provide sufficient and accurate information, nor does it adequately promote the content that the destination offers. It is important to note that none of the sites analyzed offer the option of online ticket purchase for museums, galleries, or tourist sites. On some sites, the information about their working hours is incomplete. Furthermore, no institution uses the possibility of paid advertising on internet platforms or SEO optimization of content. Even the Tourist Organization does not utilize these options; research indicates that only private local businesses use them. When examining social networks, it was found that the Kotor Tourist Organization has over 30,000 followers on both networks combined, while institutions like museums have only about 1,000 followers. One reason for the smaller following lies in the fact that institutions do not use the possibility of paid advertising on digital platforms, which has been proven to increase visibility of their pages. The other reason is that they do not follow the "rules" of posting on social media, which require daily posting and alignment with current trends in a specific format. Previously, a good photograph of attractions was sufficient, but now trendy short video clips, accompanied by audio subtitles, are essential. Earlier research showed that 67% of the global population uses the Internet, and currently, 62% use social media, with platforms like Google, YouTube, and Facebook each having hundreds of millions of visits per month. This leads to the conclusion that there is a strong foundation for using these marketing tools on digital platforms to enhance the city's offering through investment in digital technology development. This would significantly improve the overall satisfaction with the tourist offer, as well as create the potential to increase the number of returning visitors and the selection of services offered. Satisfaction with the destination, influenced by the ease of travel and choice of services, can significantly impact the decision to revisit a destination or recommend it to someone else, thus highlighting the importance of creating a destination's image.

Destination management organizations or tourism service providers, if they aim to be present in the market and survive, must improve their offer in a way to digitalize it to the extent possible. This primarily refers to the presentation of their offer on all digital platforms that are trending in interactions with consumers at all stages of travel and the adjustment to their needs using various digital tools available today (creation of applications, QR codes, virtual tours, etc.). How an online presentation of content that is supposed to represent a destination through these platforms is of paramount importance, thus, the quality of content that can be found and presented is potentially crucial when making a decision to visit. The content presentation needs to be continuous, almost daily, to increase visibility to a broader audience, attractive and interesting, adapted to the current trends in digital marketing, all with the purpose of motivating potential tourists to make a positive decision about visiting. It is also necessary to follow trends in the development of information technology, which enables tourists to purchase products and services online, the suitability of content for mobile devices and the diversity of content, all with the aim of increasing the overall satisfaction of users. With this in mind, the key factor for gaining competitiveness in the market and creating a destination image is an adequate marketing strategy development with a contemporary approach and implementing promotional activities on the internet and social networks with a special focus on online image.

Based on everything stated above, in future research, it is necessary to deepen this topic and examine whether there are marketing and development strategies of the mentioned institutions that include the development of ICT as the current Strategy for the development of tourism in Montenegro suggests, which use all these promotional activities and how effective they are in yielding results.



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