

# **VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND ICTS FOR THE APPLICATION OF VALUE CO-CREATION STRATEGIES IN HOTELS' WEBSITES IN ATHENS, GREECE**

**Vicky KATSONI**

Associate Professor, University of Western Attica, Department of Tourism Management, Ag.  
Spiridonos and Milou 1, 12210, Egaleo, Greece  
katsoniv@gmail.com

**Panagiota DIONYSOPOULOU**

Co-operative Tutor of Hellenic Open University, Athens, Greece  
yoldi@hol.gr

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of the way principals for tourism development could incorporate Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into their models, addressing such issues as new visual communication technologies and value co-creation, based on a survey in the city of Athens, Greece. The authors argue that collaboration among key stakeholders in the tourism industry around ICT may assist in the promotion of the destination and enhance economic development. The paper demonstrates the need to redefine the relationships and the ways of communication and value co-creation between tourism principals, according to new requirements in the evolutionary process of the tourism phenomenon.

**Keywords:** ICTs, Value co-creation, Visual Communication, e-Tourism, C-commerce

**JEL classification:** Z3, Z33, Z32, Z38, M31, M15

## **1. Introduction**

All tourism stakeholders try to keep pace with the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), since new tools constantly emerge and aim for an effective and efficient response to evolving tourism marketing needs (Sigala and Baum, 2003; Braun and Hollick, 2006; Fuchs et al, 2007; Buhalis and Law, 2008); peer-to-peer communication is built and influential virtual communities are formed. These trends define also the future of marketing, especially in the field of the hotels' "web presence", as the majority of the hotels have already realized the importance of the internet as an innovative distribution channel for disseminating information on products and services, for online purchases and for opportunity to communicate directly with e-consumers. These hotels are trying to build the best websites in order to enhance their attractiveness and promote sales (Law and Hsu, 2006). The present paper provides an understanding of the way principals for tourism development could incorporate ICTs and Social Media (SM) into their models, addressing such issues as new technologies and their relation to the travel behavior, based on a survey in Athens, Greece. The paper demonstrates the contribution of Visual Communication in the city of Athens, Greece, and the need to redefine the relationships and the ways of communication between tourism principals, according to new requirements in the evolutionary process of the tourism phenomenon.

## **2. Background literature review**

### **2.1. ICTs' role in Destination Marketing Practises**

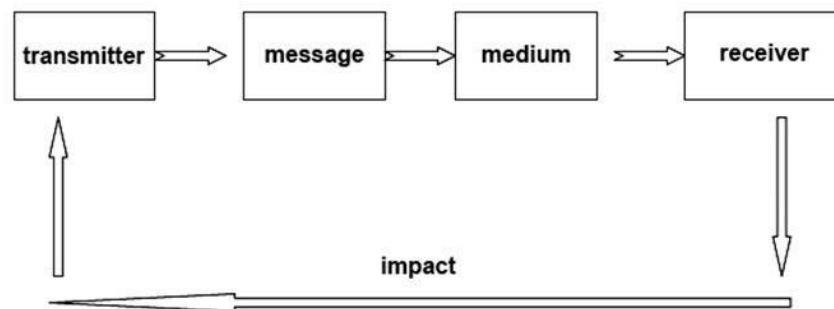
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in general and Internet in particular, have surmounted temporal and geographical barriers and have tremendously affected the tourism industry as they are characterized by public access, open standard, global connectedness, and real-time communication, enabling the evolution of tourism demand and supply. The establishment of new technologies such as travel communities, blogs, travel review websites, photo galleries, visitor books, GIS applications, interactive maps and so on, have a role to play which may lead to economic activity and can be a means to reduce social

exclusion; they may achieve networks that link the global, the nation state and organizations (Argyropoulou et al, 2011; Werthner and Klein, 1999). However, ICTs can be fruitful only if “certain prerequisites are satisfied, namely long term planning, innovative business processes re-engineering, top management commitment and training throughout the hierarchy” (Buhalis, 1998, p. 410). In addition, e-business adoption leads to value co-creation, that is the process where “the consumer and the firm are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer and sustainable to the firm” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

A type of network with great potential for tourism development is the ‘virtual’ or ‘social’ network, that is according to Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010): “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”. The importance of Social Media and Consumer-Generated Media, as defined by Yoo and Gretzel (2011), provide “a new form of word-of-mouth that serve informational needs by offering non-commercial, detailed, experiential and up-to-date information with an access beyond the boundaries of one’s immediate social circle”. Therefore, websites should be more user-friendly, more understandable and more attractive and to inspire credibility (Xiang et al., 2010). Planning should be done carefully, paying attention even to details (using appropriate colors and sharp color contrasts, sharp images, smooth fonts readability, etc.), while the information must be accurate and updated frequently with personalized information, direct and live content (fashion, daily weather, etc.). A successful online promotion can be achieved by creating an “ideal” navigation experience on the website with feedback, either for a simple user or a potential traveler (Dionysopoulou and Pridezi, 2011). The perceived image of a tourism destination is influenced by the content of its website and creates an enhanced virtual experience for the tourist (Gretzel et al., 2006). Websites cover a large part of the tourism market with different needs and desires, aiming to satisfy the needs of all categories of tourists (Edwards and Curado, 2003); however, more content does not necessarily mean more effective advertising, as it may cause users’ frustration in the reading process (Wang et al., 2005). A webpage should have hierarchical structure, designed by following the cycle of “the visitor’s journey”, from the initial contact when it needs to inspire him, charm him, impress him and make him dream a potential trip to the destination. Then it must give him the necessary information to plan his trip and also the opportunity to share his experiences of this trip (Fotiadis, 2009). Each site should have the opportunity to “seduce” the visitor, stimulate his interest, keep the attention more than a fleeting glance and create the desire to visit this destination or hotel. Thus, the success of a website depends not only on the accuracy and regularly updated information it contains, but also on the value-added services it can offer. Such value-added tools are: attractive messages, strategic choice of words, interactive maps, virtual tours, multilingual support, use of appropriate colors and high-quality photo, video and music, correct fonts readability, annual events calendar, forums, online surveys, informational e-mails and entertainment items (games, quizzes, screen savers).

## **2.2. The role of visual communication in tourism**

According to Mc Quail, 1994, based on a previous study from Lasswell, 1948, the communication process as the social interaction through messages is built on five key elements, as seen in Figure 1 below: the transmitter, the message he wants to convey, the medium or communication channel selected for the transmission of the message, the receiver who gets the message and the impact of the message on the receiver (Mc Quail, 2001).

**Figure 1. The communication process**

Source: Mc Quail, 2001, p.23

Given that the concept of communication is accrete with the human nature, its evolution and the need for a contact with other people, visual communication, responsible for conveying information, ideas, messages or emotions plays an important role in shaping and influencing ideas, tastes and values through advertisements, promotional materials, product packaging, web design. As visual communication, we define the communication through visual messages, which must be designed, organized and conveyed via the proper form and means in order to be downloaded from the receiver's optical nervous system. (Bithynos et al., 2002). The great Greek philosopher Aristotle in his book *Art-Rhetoric* defines the rhetoric as the faculty to have someone the means to persuade. But even the visual communication has its own rhetorical action, which transforms a simple sentence. At the time of creation, the transmitter encodes the message with the selection and arrangement of objects within the image, starting with a simple sentence or creating a photographic print or an art project, which formed into a rhetorical shape. Upon receiving the message, the receiver restores the idea in its original form and should decode it through associations, semantic analysis or personal experiences in order to understand the image and the message sent by the transmitter through it (Antoniadis, 2002). Thus, the communication through the photographic capture is based on the detection and decoding of signs it contains (Antoniadis, 2002). The picture, therefore, is considered as a visual language with a global reach and has already begun to replace the speech form. The fast decipherment of messages offered for the transmission of a message (visualization of message) render it particularly popular as a mean of visual communication. Nowadays, image is the primary ingredient and the product is treated simply as a variable that attempts to represent the image (Schroeder, 2002) and, in many cases, the message is decoded by the consumer more quickly and accurately (Machin, 2004).

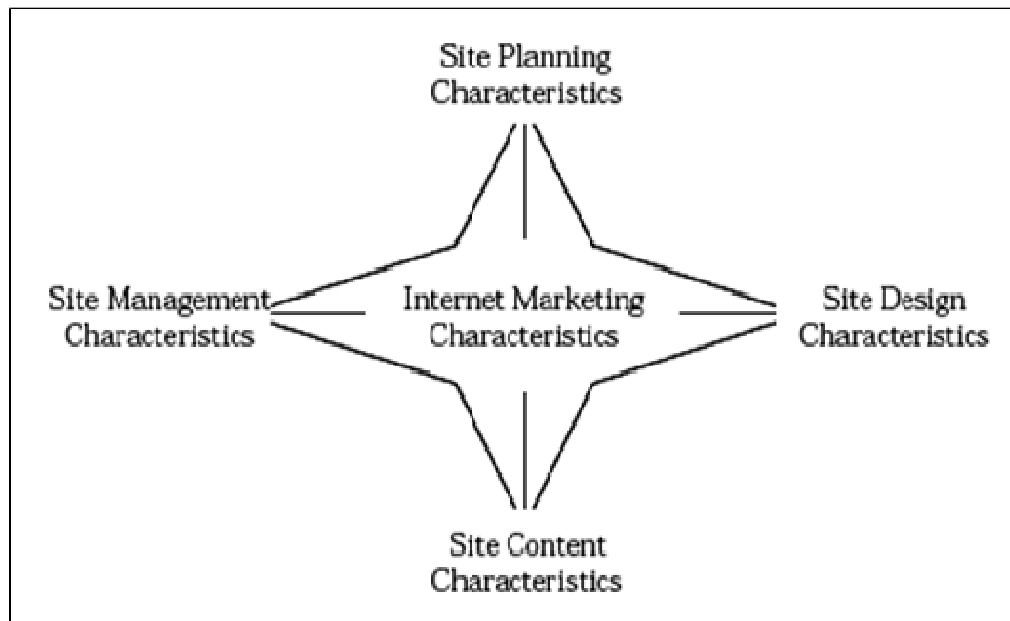
Image has become a strategic tool and constitutes a competitive advantage in tourism (Pikkemaat, 2003). Choosing a tourism destination or an accommodation is a difficult task for the tourists, especially considering the special characteristics and the particularities of the tourism product, which should be conceived as a complex product, such as a composition of material goods and intangible services (Middleton, 2001). Therefore, it is considered to be heterogeneous, not a priori distinguishable given that it is defined by the consumer behavior of the tourists themselves, not tangible and thus not visible before the consumption (Baker, 1991). This means that, due to the intangible elements of tourism product, tourists evaluate it after having consumed it (Middleton and Hawkins, 2004). The way the tourist information is presented influences also the individual judgements and choices (Orth et al., 2007). Furthermore, tourism businesses are called to serve the global tourism market directly and to offer updated, interactive and qualitative information, according to new demands and needs of the modern tourist in a competitive environment which is characterized by constant changes in tourism demand trends and by the entry of new tourism destinations in the world map.

Recognizing these characteristics, tourism businesses search for the best promotion of the tourism product through the proper selection of mass media, movies, various television programs, literature etc., which can all provide substantial information about a destination and cause a variety of emotions and desires (Hyounggon and Richardson, 2003). Moscardo (1996) emphasizes the importance of orientation of tourists' behavior and the effects of interaction through the use of those media, which involve all five senses of the human being. Considering

the behavioral profile of tourists, businesses will be able to reach them with the appropriate communication tools in order to shape their opinions and desires during the destination selection. Concerning the effectiveness of advertising in combination with the use of more information in text, graphics (static/animated) and video on travel agency websites (Wang et al., 2005), it is noticed that more content does not mean more effective advertising, because it caused users frustration in the reading process. Tversky and Morrison (2002) argue that the incorporation of video into the components mix enhances ad effectiveness and consumers' perception of the destination image for the moment that the tourism product is tangible through the power of the image (Seaton and Hay, 1998). The tourism marketing plans to attract new visitors, or to remind ex visitors to return, using various communication processes and tools (Pan and Fesenmaier, 2006). Hotels and travel agencies usually offer a combination of visual and verbal communication in order to create an attractive product for the consumer and to stimulate their interest. The websites cover a large part of the tourism market with different needs and desires, aiming to satisfy the needs of all categories of tourists (Edwards and Curado, 2003). Seeking for new models and forms of communication, tourism businesses have turned to multimedia, which use text, audio, images and video (Sloan, 1996) and offer to the tourist-consumer interactivity and the ability to participate actively in the communication process (Bithynos et al., 2002). The same result can be achieved through virtual reality for the moment that it essentially offers "a multi-sensory experience" (Holmes, 2001).

At this point, it should be noted that McLuhan, communication theorist and philosopher of the 20th century, focused primarily on the way (by what means) a person experiences the world and not what (content) experiences, putting great emphasis on the strength of the medium. With the famous phrase "The medium is the message", McLuhan argues the power of the means in modern communication procedures (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). A medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only by the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself. So the message is not in the text but in the print media, on television or internet. Therefore, the value of means is defined by the way we use them. Ultimately, "no matter what medium we use, it is important that we be able to communicate clearly and precisely, and we are more likely to do so when we are explicitly aware of the character of the medium" (Robinson et al., 1976). It is true that "a picture is worth a thousand words". But in design, it is so difficult to translate these thousand words, which are the goals and the message of a business, to a picture. The visualization of the message is met in all media. The space of promotion of the tourism product determines often its communicative nature. In the vast world of Internet information is not hierarchical nor controlled (Robbins and Webster, 1999). Internet has its own rules and requirements. For example, in print media when something is written, usually, there is an introduction, then an analysis of the issue with the presentation of arguments and finally the findings. On the internet, information follows the reverse path, with "the final message" at the beginning in order to facilitate users to find what they are looking for. The necessary elements of a successful website development grouped into four categories and the Internet marketing star is made up of these four categories (Fig.2):

- Planning (business objectives and identification of the target audience)
- Design (website design with interactive tools)
- Content (accuracy of the information presented and updated text content)
- Management (management and regular update)

**Figure 2. Internet Marketing Star**

: Benckendorff and Black, 2000, p.13

A webpage should have hierarchical structure, designed by following the cycle of “the visitor’s journey”, from the initial contact when it needs to inspire him, charm him, impress him and make him dream a potential trip to the destination. Then it must give him the necessary information to plan his trip and also the opportunity to share his experiences of this trip (Fotiadis, 2009). Meanwhile, the modern tourist is looking for recreation and personal consummation through unique experiences and emotions. Even the selection of a tourism product is based on his emotions, related to his needs and incentives such as relaxation, pleasure, prestige, etc. There is a correlation between logical and emotional incentives when consumers choose and buy a tourism product. The modern tourism industry does not seek to cover basic needs, anymore, but “sells” feelings and experiences. The feeling, however, is not something that we read. We want to feel it with all our senses before the trip. It is no coincidence, moreover, that many businesses have invested in this sector.

A successful website promotion will stimulate the attention and interest of potential customers; this requires creativity, originality, good knowledge of the communication process and searching of the best practices of other businesses worldwide (Martakis, 2005). Quoting McLuhan’s famous phrase “The medium is the message”, the power of the means in modern communication procedures becomes enormous (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967), as a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only by the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself.

### **2.3. Tourism and C-commerce; the case of Athens, Greece**

An effective tourism marketing strategy contributes to the economic regeneration of cities, increases the use of external information and improves the perception value and availability of a destination (Bitsani and Kavoura, 2011, p. 35; Katsoni, 2011). Tourism boards can have a significant impact on these processes. In a recent study by Chiabai et al., (2011) in the City of Genoa in Italy, respondents were asked to suggest a set of e-services that could help in improving cultural tourism management and the visitors’ experience. The e-services proposed by the respondents were classified into informative, communicative and participative e-services. In the first group, the user has a passive presence, only receiving information without interacting with other users or the service providers. The communicative e-services require an active attitude of the user because a dialogue is established among users and with service providers. The participatory e-services require the user to be involved in the cultural heritage management at various stages of the decision-making process, as they are asked to provide suggestions and opinions about some specific issues, and also e-Governance, where

citizens are directly involved in the decision-making for local actions. (Chiabai et al., 2011:45).

C-commerce combines e-services that improve cultural heritage, interpret the visitors' experience of local assets, and support communication with service providers (Mitsche et al., 2008). An interactive information exchange with the satisfied customer underlines a strong customer focus (Rust and Kannan 2003; Baida et al., 2004) and encourages the ongoing dialogue between the public and private sectors, as it provides information flows between business entities, forming collaborative management practices, and incorporating new culture, relationships, assumptions, trust, and all aspects that value partnerships. Collaborating organisations consider other organisations as an extension of the one, rather than as competitors (Chi and Holsapple, 2005; Levy et al., 2003).

C-commerce created from tourism destination Websites is particularly important, as the content of the Website directly influences the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience for the consumer. This experience is greatly enhanced when Websites offer interactivity (Gretzel et al., 2006) and when a specific whole is created and advertised electronically. The promotion of such virtual experience via the website may not only include more than one participating businesses, but, on the contrary, it can create a network, aiming to promote a unique and consistent identity destination message.

Athens is a city with many tangible and intangible values, which create historical, cultural, tourist, social, artistic, environmental and emotional appreciation and has political, social and economic connotations. This study discusses the informative and communicative e-services offered in the city of Athens, Greece; Participative e-services were not analyzed, as they received the lowest priority compared to informative and communicative e-services in the Chiabai et al study mentioned above, as the authors think they do not serve the purpose of this research.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Objectives and research questions**

Two separate primary surveys, using two different structured questionnaires with closed and open type questions, were carried out in Athens, during the period from November 2014 to May 2015, based on the conclusions and experience gained from other two pilot studies in 2010 and 2013. The research aimed at two objectives: the first one is the record of tourism demand trends and the modern tourist profile, regarding the use of print and electronic media, with particular emphasis on Internet. The second one was focused on the tourism offer, attempting to outline the specific actions used by the tourism businesses in order to communicate with the potential tourists/customers and meet their expectations and their needs, by emphasizing on the tools of visual communication.

Based on the conceptual framework described in this study, the hypotheses or research questions considered are:

- What are the tourists' desires and needs regarding tourist information and services offered in Athens?
- What are the tourists' desires and needs on Internet services offered by hotels and tourism agencies?
- What are the businesses' desires and needs on Internet services offered by hotels and tourism agencies?
- What is the communication policy implemented by the hotels and travel agencies, what aspects are covered by the advertising and what strategic and effective promotional methods could use in order to reach the modern tourist?
- Is there a match between the needs and desires of the above mentioned parties?

- Is that in accordance of the cultural heritage profile of Athens and fulfills the needs of the previously mentioned set of e-services that could help in improving cultural tourism management and the visitors' experience?

### **3.2. Sample design and data collection**

The first survey was addressed to a sample of 116 tourists and visitors of Athens. In particular, the participants were 54 women and 62 men, aged 17 and over. Respondents were both foreigners and Greeks who were selected by random sampling at Athens International Airport (AIA) and outside the Museum of Acropolis. The questionnaire was anonymous, included 15 questions in Greek and English language. The independent variables used in this questionnaire were age, sex, education level, nationality and frequency of trips made per year.

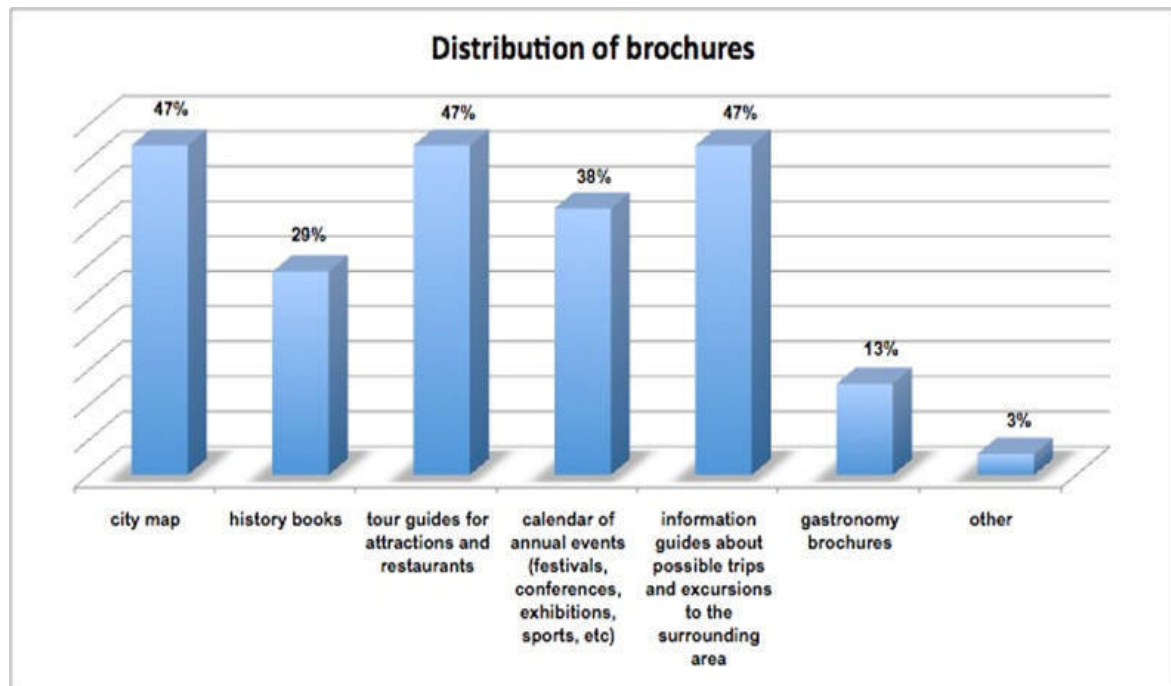
The second survey aimed at managers of hotels and travel agencies of the region of Attica. The questionnaire had 25 questions, the method of personal interview was used and after a random choice, 92 businesses participated:

- 49 hotels (5 \*, 4 \* and 3 \*)
- 43 travel agencies

## **4. Results**

In total, 208 sample questionnaires were collected from both surveys (116+92), of which all of them were usable. According to the demographic and trip characteristics results of the first survey addressed to the 116 visitors-tourists of Greece, we had the following results: 54 respondents (47%) were women and 62 men (53%), 75% of them were between 17-45 years old, while 59% were university graduates. A large proportion of the sample (61%) said that they didn't travel frequently (till 3 times a year) and choose to travel individually (75%) rather than choose a tour package.

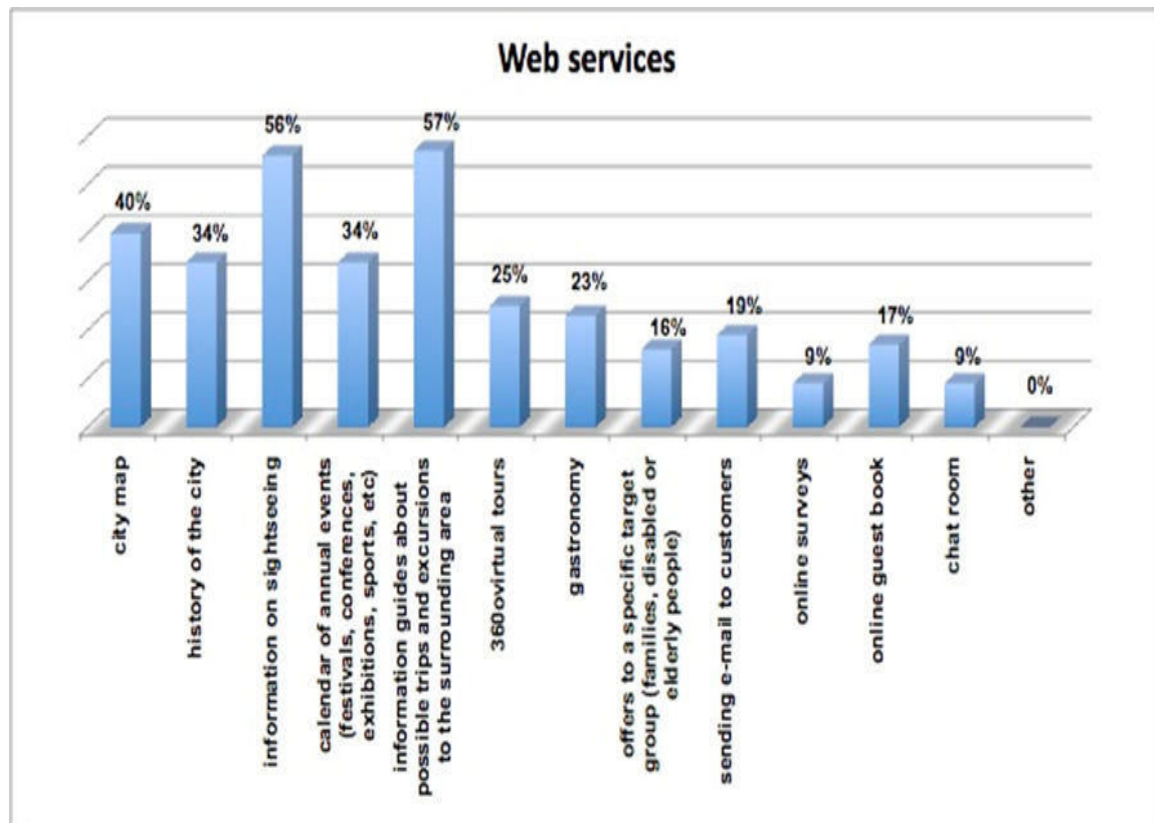
The experiences of friends and relatives (49%) and internet (32%) are the most common ways to choose Athens as a tourism destination. On the other hand, the tourists do not seem to trust media in order to choose Athens as a tourism destination, although it is very likely to use them, in general, as sources of information. The majority of visitors prefer less the GNTO (Greek National Tourism Organization) offices abroad to obtain reliable information (3%). For those who first visited Athens, the reasons for which they had not visited before were the incomplete and/or negative information about the city (47%). Between the main reasons for which they will not intend to visit Greece within the next years or would not recommend the city of Athens to friends and relatives, were cost (49%), hygiene (80%), transport (70%) and the lack of environmental awareness (50%). In the multiple choice question put to the tourists about what kind of information should be distributed to them by hotels and travel agencies in brochures (Fig.3), 47% answers a city map, tour guides for attractions and restaurants and guides with information about possible trips in the surrounding area. 37% of them prefer a calendar of annual events (festivals, conferences, exhibitions, sports, etc.), while for 29% and 13% history books and gastronomy brochures are respectively between their preferences

**Figure 3. Distribution of brochures**

According to the multiple-type question put to tourists on which additional services they consider necessary in web sites, in order to choose a hotel or a travel agency, tourists consider as more attractive the following additional web services: 57% want information on possible excursions to the surrounding area, such as islands, villages, etc. (66 tourists), 56% would like more information about sightseeing (65 tourists), 40% (46 tourists) would like a detailed map of the area and 34% (40 tourists) would like more information about the historical and cultural sites of the city. Furthermore, 46 tourists are looking for a calendar of annual events such as festivals, conferences, exhibitions, sports activities, etc. (34%) and 29 tourists would like the existence of interactive virtual tours and trips through the websites of hotels and travel agencies (25%). Availability of local gastronomy (23%), informative e-mails (19%), on-line surveys (9%) and chat rooms (9%) follow, as it can be seen at figure 4 below.



Figure 4. Web services offered by hotels



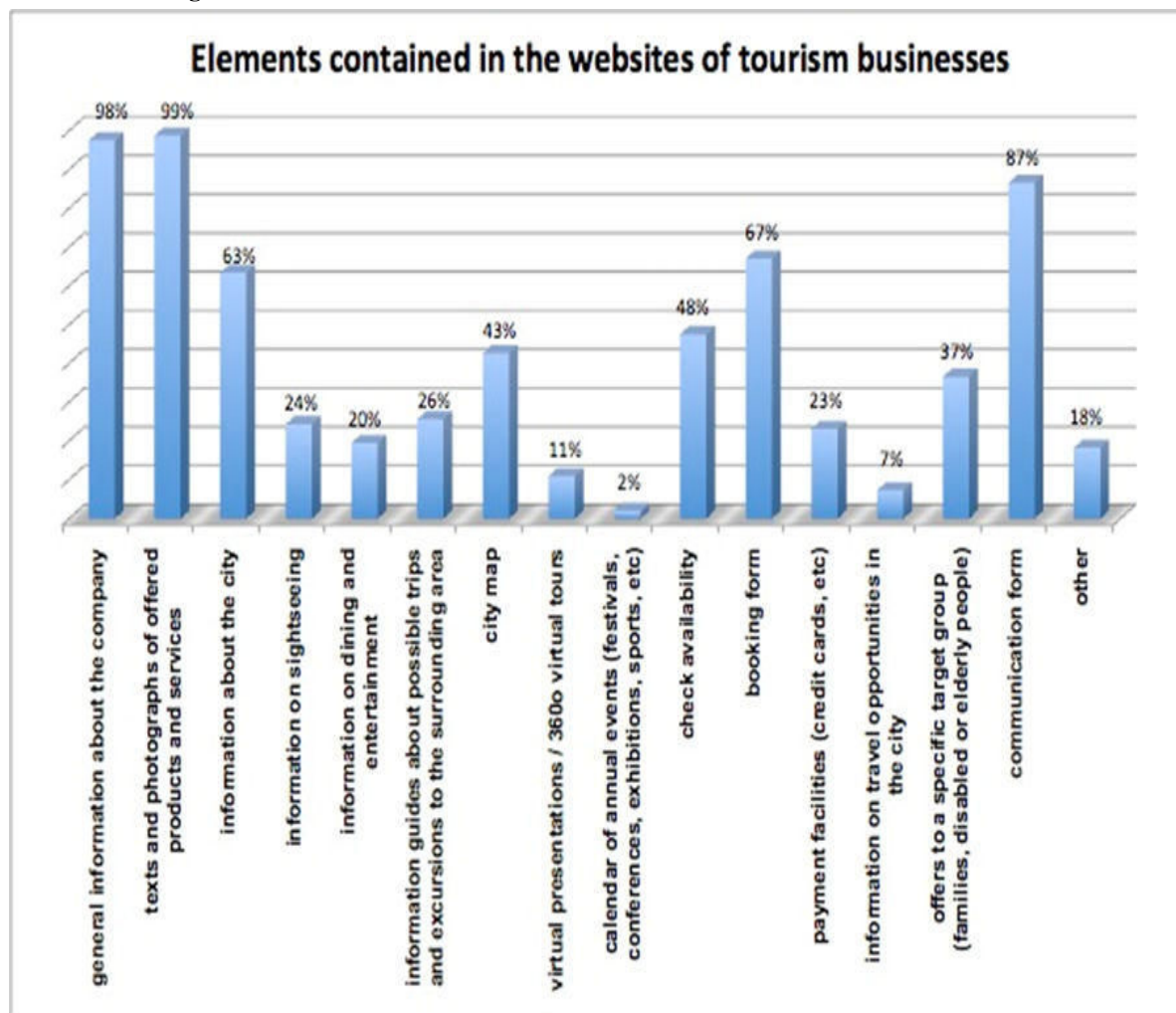
According to the results of the second survey which took place in the 92 tourism businesses of Attica, it is noticed that their customers are between 31-45 years old (88%) and 73% of the sample carries out a market research in order to know the needs and desires of their customers. In 71% of businesses operates a Sales and Public Relations Department, while a large percentage (75%) have set a goal to attract a specific tourism market (target group), such as wellness tourism, conference tourism, incentives, etc. The marketing tools used by businesses are ads in print media (66%), online advertising (71%) and distribution of brochures (61%). It is significant that the vast majority of the sample has a webpage (89%). However, with few exceptions, businesses have websites with low quality content and limited navigation. This is evidenced by the fact that 66% rarely update (1-2 times/year) the content of their WebPages, 33% of them updates often (4-6 times/year) and only 1% updates very often (every month). The main language in which information is available is English (85%) and Greek follows with 76%.

The percentage of customers who prefer the online booking is relatively low (15% for hotels and 28% for travel agencies). This shows that businesses have not understood the usefulness of a well designed website and the peculiarities of Internet. Noteworthy is the fact that 3\* hotels present more responsive to the needs and desires of tourists, offering well designed and multilingual websites, rich information material, high quality photos and virtual tours. However, the large percentage of businesses seems to be optimistic and is satisfied with the advertising effectiveness (85%), while only 15% reported that ad is not so effective.

In the question put to the managers and hotel owners however, the information contained in the websites of hotels and travel agencies was limited to text and photographs on the services and products (99%), general information about the company (98%), a communication form (87%) and a booking form (67%). In contrast, low percentages hold those actions which tourists consider as very important and attractive, such as information on attractions (24%), information on dining and entertainment (20%), virtual presentations/360° virtual tours (11%), information on travel opportunities in the city (7%) and annual events calendar of the city, such as festivals, conferences, exhibitions, sports, etc. (2%). It is also important to note, that neither of the above businesses had a link with sites or portals of the

Greek National Tourist Organization, the Greek Ministry of Tourism, the portal of the Municipality of Athens, or any other public DMO.

**Figure 5. Information contained in the websites of tourism businesses**



## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

Tourism destination stakeholders may become committed to its branding and promotional efforts and actively participate to the city's promotion, including themselves to such a branding procedure (Kemp et al., 2012; Kerrigan et al., 2012; Kuscer, 2013). In that way and with the contribution of technological advancement the way in which destinations are imagined may be affected (Frías et al., 2012, p. 439). Regarding the results of this primary survey, it is noticed that the destination's pre-visit image assumed by visitors of a tourism destination is essential for the promotion and competitiveness of the tourism product. For a large proportion of respondents (38%), Athens was not an attractive destination.

Generally, the image of a tourism destination is created through direct and indirect advertising communicated abroad. Media, including entertainment media, internet, tour operators, travel brochures, the experiences of relatives and friends are sources of information about a tourism destination. The survey underlines the necessity to find some alternative ways of promotion and marketing, which are beyond usual practices and therefore will be more effective. Nowadays, tourists know exactly what they want and they are able to prepare their own holidays, based on their wishes. The long-term trends in tourism demand show the need to develop thematic discussion forums, where groups of users can discuss various subjects based on their interests (e.g., forest protection, wine tourism, ecotourism), share their experiences and multimedia material (photographs, videos, audio files), communicate and advise other members (Sigala et al., 2007). The effective promotion of the destination requires creativity, originality, good knowledge of the communication process and searching of the

best practices of other businesses worldwide (Martakis, 2005). An advertisement showing impressive plans from the interior of a hotel or the natural beauties and attractions of a region could create a very positive opinion, but it would not translated necessarily into a desire to visit it. The question is therefore how effective are the means of communication, how could influence the tourism market, how businesses exploit their power and how could use them in the best possible ways in order to achieve the best possible results. Furthermore, an ad that no one read it in a magazine or watch it on television has no effect. For example, the brochures are now obsolete. They could be used to attract people at an initial level but certainly they are not the decisive tool for tourists-consumers to decide a tourism destination.

This paper asserts that the digital era calls for collaborative management practices between the tourists, the public and private sectors, thus enhancing and reinforcing the management of cultural tourism in Athens. All these groups should develop dynamic relations with the aim to cooperate and collaborate rather than compete (Kavoura and Katsoni, 2013). The creation of collaborative commerce (c-commerce) requires a new approach by management incorporating a user-centric approach for sustainable cultural management of the town's e-services and comply to tourists needs; new relationships based on trust, and a culture that values partnerships are essential.

It seems that tourism businesses in the city of Athens neither satisfy the promotional marketing needs of a cultural destination, nor adopt a tourist-centric approach. According to the present study, the information contained in the websites of hotels and travel agencies was limited to text and photographs on the services and products (99%), general information about the company (98%), a communication form (87%) and a booking form (67%). In contrast, low percentages hold those actions which tourists consider as very important and attractive, such as information on attractions (24%), information on dining and entertainment (20%), virtual presentations/360° virtual tours (11%), information on travel opportunities in the city (7%) and annual events calendar of the city, such as festivals, conferences, exhibitions, sports, etc. (2%).

The informative and communicative e-services provided, as mentioned above, are not only inadequate but in some cases do not even exist at all, as there is no link mentioned or provided in their websites to other tourism stakeholders who are able and efficient in providing these services themselves. Tourism stakeholders in Athens do not have to compete with each other, but on the contrary, they can collaborate in many areas, including their websites, so that all partners can win and thus creating a win-win solution. Creation of c-commerce could enable all tourist stakeholders involved to use technology effectively and in time, to take advantage of situations that may emerge in the market, and to enable small independent tourism players to form partnerships in an expeditious way to keep up with or to access unique or innovating resources.

In an increasingly competitive environment, the new tourism products should gain added-value and be able to satisfy the customers in order to gain their trust and loyalty. Moreover, the expectations are not the same for all tourists and are always changing over time. This finding requires constant evaluation of the impact of these changes and strategy review. Furthermore, the effective implementation of good practices and the successful and proper use of new technologies and visual communication's tools are required. It is obvious that traditional methods of communication are insufficient, while modern ones are on the way and should replace the old, such as road tours, video surround, virtual reality, interactive digital communication and online games. The online communication is offered as a wonderful tool of visual communication, marketing and promotion of products and services. It is one of the best practices in order to raise emotions, "steal" the impression and the prospective visitors further aiming at the intense desire to visit and live the "dream" offered in their virtual tours. Therefore, websites should be more user-friendly, more understandable and more attractive and to inspire credibility. Planning should be done carefully, paying attention even to details (using appropriate colors and sharp color contrasts, sharp images, smooth fonts readability, etc.), while the information must be accurate and updated frequently with personalized information, direct and live content.

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