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IZVIRNI ZNANSTVENI ČLANEK – ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

INFORMATION SOURCES USED BY VISITORS LOOKING FOR DIFFERENT BENEFITS: THE CASE OF PORTOROŽ

Uporaba virov informacij med obiskovalci z različnimi motivi za potovanje – primer Portoroža

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Abstract

This paper examines the information sources of visitors to Portorož for four identified distinct clusters of visitors. The study focused on using a single one source of information about Portorož regardless of the cluster to which the visitors belonged. The Internet and brochures were identified as the most important sources of information in general. The cluster defined as "well-being visitors" demonstrated a significantly different structure of information sources, relying predominantly on brochures and the Internet. Unlike first-time visitors, regular visitors indicated a relatively low percentage of Internet and brochure use.

Keywords: market segments, information source, brochures, the Internet

Izvleček

Namen članka je proučiti vire informacij, ki jih uporabljajo štirje različni grozdi (ang. cluster) obiskovalcev Portoroža. Ne glede na grozd največ obiskovalcev Portoroža uporablja le en vir informacij. Splet in brošure so na splošno prepoznani kot najpomembnejši vir informacij. Grozd »well-being obiskovalcev« ima značilno drugačno strukturo z močnim poudarkom na pridobivanju informacij s pomočjo brošur in spleta. Le majhen odstotek obiskovalcev Portoroža za vir informacij uporablja internet in brošure, kar pa ne velja za tiste, ki Portorož obiščejo prvič.

Klučne besede: tržni segmenti, viri informacij, brošure, splet

1 Introduction

Potential visitors to destinations can access various sources of information that brings intangible tourism products, which cannot be tested in advance, closer to the potential consumers. As such, potential visitors can access information and increase their knowledge about tourism products and destinations in the earliest stages of the buying process (Bieger & Laesser, 2001).

Tourists use various types and amounts of information sources in their vacation planning (Fodness & Murray, 1999). Beatty and Smith (1987, cited in Crotts, 1999) defined four basic categories of information sources for consumers: (a) personal (advice from relatives and friends), (b) marketer-dominated (e.g., brochures, advertisements), (c) neutral (e.g., travel agents and travel

guides), and (d) experiential sources (e.g., past visits). Brochures remain the most widespread sources of information for travellers (see, for instance, Bieger & Laesser, 2000; Middleton, Fyall, & Morgan, 2009). Andereck (2005) found that a brochure significantly increases travellers' interest in first visiting a destination as well as subsequent visits. Information sources are designed to attract attention among potential travellers and stimulate interest for demand. Electronic media, especially the use of the Internet, is expanding rapidly in destination promotion. Buhalis (2003) highlighted the importance of the Internet for destination marketing. Kribel and Bojnec (2007) investigated the use of marketing communication channels and e-services, focusing on the Internet and web use for information service, communication, and marketing tools, among Slovenian travel agencies and compared the results to those from travel agencies in Turkey. The multivariate factor analysis for Slovenia confirmed that price and quality of services are the dominant factors for medium-sized travel agencies whereas for larger-sized travel agencies reservation information dominates and for small-sized travel agencies different information and links dominate.

A survey on information and communication technology usage in households and among individuals in the 27 EU member states as well as Norway, Iceland, and Croatia, conducted by Eurostat (European Travel Commission, 2010), showed that 26% of Slovenia's inhabitants aged 16 to 74 had used the Internet for travel and accommodation services in the first quarter of 2008. However, this percentage varies by country. Other sources of information for tourists include guidebooks, information given by travel agencies, word-of-mouth or information given by reference groups (e.g., friends and relatives), and participation in fairs and exhibitions.

Research on information sources used by travellers may have more practical value for destination management, marketing, and promotion if it is focused on specific market segments of tourists. Thus, market segmentation is usually used to acquire better insights into the usage of information sources. Indeed, tourism segmentation is an important tool for dividing the entire tourist market according to specific characteristics of the market's supply and demand. Middleton et al. (2009, p. 97) found that market segmentation helps identify the most productive targets for marketing activities. Market segmentation is "a division of large, heterogeneous markets into smaller segments that can be reached more efficiently and effectively with products and services that match their unique needs" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2009, p. 216). Segmentation in tourism helps identify the characteristics of specific segments of tourists. Such characteristics can encompass information about demographics, activities in which visitors or tourists engage, travel-related information, and other information. Understanding these characteristics is fundamental for designing appropriate and successful marketing strategies for a tourism destination.

This paper aims to investigate information-gathering efforts of different tourist market segments in Portorož according to benefits sought by visitors. Portorož, located on the Slovenian Adriatic coast, is the most important tourism destination in Slovenia according to tourists' arrivals and overnight stays. Specifically, the objectives of this paper are to:

– identify information sources of each segment of visitors,

– conduct empiric testing if statistically significant differences emerge in the usage of information sources among the segments, and

– examine the differences in the usage of information sources among first-time visitors and regular visitors for each cluster.

2 Literature Review

Searching for information on destinations has become one of the most popular issues in tourism research (Chen & Gursoy, 2000). Identifying and understanding information-gathering efforts among specific segments of visitors helps optimally allocate and direct information channels used by potential visitors to destinations. Such knowledge can in turn be used to determine strategies to enhance destination marketing. In addition, destinations are better able to reach more specific segments. Information available to potential visitors is used to make travel and destination choices. As such, it is not surprising that experts in tourist behaviour significantly emphasize information searches and the use of information sources. Understanding information source utilization helps marketers effectively tailor their marketing efforts (Gursoy & Chi, 2008). Market segmentation can even improve the knowledge of information sources, thereby providing important issues for specific segments of visitors. Schul and Crompton (1983, in Chen & Gursoy, 2000) found that information search behaviour is better explained by psychographic segmentation than demographic segmentation. Haley (1968) initially demonstrated that benefit segmentation can predict better buying behaviour of customers than geographic or demographic segmentation.

However, many distinct approaches and bases can be used for market segmentation. Homogeneous groups within the tourism market can be identified by a number of different segment variables depending on the purpose. This literature review highlights a number of studies using geographic segmentation of tourists (Kozak, 2002), demographic characteristics (Juaneda & Sastre, 1999), psychographics (Galloway, 2002), expenditures (Diaz-Perez, Bethencourt-Cejaz, & Alvarez-Gonzales, 2005; Mok & Iverson, 2000), motivations (Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Bieger & Lasser, 2002; Boo & Jones, 2009; Lee, Lee, Bernhard, & Yoon, 2006), activities (Choi & Tsang, 1999; McKercher, Ho, du Cros, & So-Ming, 2002), and benefit segmentation (Frochot, 2005; Jang, Morrison, & O'Leary, 2001), just to name a few studies. These segmentation techniques

can be divided into *a priori* and *a posteriori* segmentation (Mazanec, 2000) according to the approach used in the segmentation process. *A priori* or pre-existing market segments in the tourism industry are defined by splitting the market in advance, usually according to geographic or demographic variables of visitors (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2003). According to Dolnicar and Gruen (2008, p. 63), in *a priori* segmentation, "the crucial decision is on the selection of the segmentation criterion or criteria". On the other hand, in *a posteriori* segmentation, the identification of segments is derived from the exploratory study.

Dolnicar and Leisch (2003) found several differences regarding the use of various sources of information among winter tourist segments in Austria based on lifestyle segmentation. Differences were noted in the use of brochures, media ads, tour operators, friends and relatives, travel agents, and tourism bureaus, but no statistically significant difference in the use of the Internet was found. Bieger and Laesser (2000) segmented travellers in Switzerland according to the information sources used. The study found that the choice of destination, the type of trip taken, and the degree of packaging are inter-correlated to the information sources. Recently, Dey and Sarma (2010) confirmed differences in information source usage among motive-based segments in newly emerging tourist destinations of India's north-east region. Moreover, Sarigollu and Huang (2005) found differences among segments of tourists in Latin America in using the Internet and consulting travel agents and travel books; yet no differences emerged among segments regarding gathering information from friends and family, newspaper travel, travel brochures, and TV travel shows. Hu and Yu (2007), in their research on shopping-related beliefs and behaviours of craft souvenir buyers, found differences in information source use. In particular, a distinction was noticed among printed materials such as directories or shop maps, travel packets from state tourism bureaus prior to a trip, and the Internet. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference existed in the usage of brochures by different segments of tourists. Meanwhile, Sirakaya, Uysal, and Yoshioka (2003) explored the use of information by different segments of Japanese tourists visiting Turkey. They did not find differences between "escapers" and "seekers" regarding paid advertising and information from social sources (such as word-of-mouth info, business colleagues, friends and family). However, they identified differences in the use of information from the government and individuals' own sources (previous experience). Kozak and Kozak (2008) conducted important research on the relevance of information sources. They found that tourists visiting Turkey are provided with information from a range of different sources. In addition, they found that the information sources vary according to visitors' level of education of purpose of their visit. Indeed, an important difference exists between information sources used by first-time and non-first-time visitors. Chen and Gursoy (2000) found significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors. Moreover, Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2008) segmented

Chinese tourists to Macao by information source available, focusing on first-time visitors.

3 Research Design

Marketers in tourism are facing a complex environment in the field of marketing and communication channels due to macro-economic developments, specific tourism developments, and marketing, information, and communication approaches. As such, they need to select the most effective tools for communication that cover the market and create awareness and interest for specific tourism products or destinations. Market segmentation can help marketers identify the most appropriate media for the specific segment. Middleton et al. (2009, 97) listed several functions of market segmentation and highlighted the segmentation as the basis for communicating relevant images to targeted potential users.

As such, acquiring knowledge about information sources is the predisposition for the sensible adoption of suitable information channels. The paper is built on Nemec Rudež, Sedmak, and Bojnec's (2011) study, which examined segments of visitors to Portorož during spring. The present research tries to analyse the connections between information sources and benefits sought by visitors. However, research in this area is lacking; thus, exploratory research is undertaken in order to answer the research question—namely, how benefits sought by visitors to Portorož and information sources are connected by different segments of visitors. In addition, the research tries to answer whether any difference exists in the usage of information sources among different segments of visitors, particularly in the usage of information sources between first-time visitors and regular visitors in each of possible cluster of specific market segments.

4 Methodology

The current study was undertaken to examine which communication channels are used by different market segments of tourists. Market segments were derived from the previous study (Nemec Rudež et al., 2011), the purpose of which was to segment the visitors according to the benefits they seek in Portorož. Multivariate factor and cluster analyses were used following Kachigan's (1991) approach. Nemec Rudež et al. (2011) identified four segments of tourists. The largest segment, "well-being visitors," seeks health and price convenience. Meanwhile, "friends-oriented visitors" prefer spending time with friends and enjoy passive approaches to leisure. "Curious passive visitors" are primarily interested in learning and having fun as well as engaging in passive ways of spending time at the seaside. Finally, "multifarious visitors" are interested mostly in spending time with friends, learning, and having fun, although they are also partly interested in relaxation, health, and price convenience.

In the current study, data used in the empirical analysis were collected by survey fieldwork using a written questionnaire between April 15 and May 31, 2010. Seven

possible sources of information for tourists were included in the written questionnaire: brochures, media advertising, guidebooks, the Internet, information from relatives and friends, tourism offices in Slovenia, and tourism fairs. More than one answer was possible as more information sources can be combined when searching for information about a destination. Respondents were selected according to the proportional quota sampling based on the structure of the nationality of foreign tourists in Portorož, resulting in 37.7% Italian visitors, 25.6% Austrian visitors, 12.0% German visitors, and 25.6% visitors from other countries. A total of 365 visitors of Pororož were included in the sample. The face-to-face survey was limited to foreign leisure visitors and was conducted in several public locations in Portorož. Written questionnaires were provided in English, German, and Italian languages.

The collected survey data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Four clusters representing four segments of visitors were cross-tabulated as external variables in order to specify information gathering by specific segments of visitors. A comparison between tourists visiting Portorož for the first time and regular visitors was performed as well.

5 Findings

The lowest share of visitors to Portorož who do not need any information is represented by "well-being visitors". Further, visitors to Portorož mostly use only one information source, varying between 40% and 61.3% of visitors in the cluster (Table 1).

Generally speaking, the most widespread information sources among the respondents are the Internet and brochures (Table 2): 124 (34.1%) respondents received information from the Internet and 121 (33.2%) respondents from brochures. Moreover, 67 (18.4%) respondents indicated receiving information from relatives and friends. The data reveal that 72 (19.8%) respondents obtained information about Portorož from guidebooks. Only 27 (7.4%) respondents answered that they obtained information from media advertising, a tourist information office in Slovenia, or a tourism fair.

The Chi square was calculated to determine if statistically significant differences in information sources exist among the four clusters (Table 2). The four clusters do not differ significantly in the use of the Internet (Chi square = 6.544, sig. = 0.088) or other sources of information (Chi square = 0.271, sig. = 0.965). However, some statistically significant differ-

Table 1. *Information Sources Used by Clusters*

	Cluster 1 – Friends-oriented visitors	Cluster 2 – Well-being visitors	Cluster 3 – Curious passive visitors	Cluster 4 – Multifarious visitors
No information needed	26 (32.1 %)	30 (18.1 %)	11 (20 %)	17 (27.4 %)
Use of one source	37 (45.7 %)	82 (49.4 %)	22 (40 %)	38 (61.3 %)
Use of two sources	15 (18.5 %)	45 (27.1 %)	20 (36.4 %)	5 (8 %)
Use of three or four sources	3 (3.7 %)	9 (5.4 %)	7 (1.2 %)	7 (1.2 %)

Source: Authors' survey results

Table 2. *Usage of Specific Information Source for Each Cluster*

	Cluster 1 – Friends-oriented visitors	Cluster 2 – Well-being visitors	Cluster 3 – Curious passive visitors	Cluster 4 – Multifarious visitors	Total	Chi-square (sig.)
Brochure	13 (16%)	87 (52.4%)	9 (16.3%)	12 (19.4%)	121	50.720 (0.000)
Guide books	17 (21%)	25 (15%)	18 (32.7%)	12 (19.4%)	72	8.222 (0.042)
Internet	21 (25.9%)	67 (40.4%)	19 (34.5%)	17 (27.4%)	124	6.544 (0.088)
Relatives and friends	19 (23.4%)	22 (13.3%)	9 (16.4%)	17 (27.4%)	67	7.817 (0.050)
Other sources	7 (8.6%)	12 (7.2%)	4 (7.3%)	4 (6.5%)	27	0.271 (0.965)

Source: Authors' survey results

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate percentage of the segment

ences emerged among the four clusters in the use of guide-books (Chi square = 8.222, sig. = 0.042), brochures (Chi square = 50.720, sig. = 0.000), and information provided by relatives and friends (Chi square = 7.817, sig. = 0.050).

The highest percentage of visitors to use brochures was found among "well-being visitors", approximately 52.4% of whom use brochures. A lower percentage of visitors (between 16% and 19.4%) in other segments use brochures. The use of guidebooks for Portorož is the most widespread among visitors who belong to the "curious passive visitors" group, representing almost one third of the cluster. Other visitors use guidebooks slightly less often, varying from 15% to 21% of visitors in the cluster. The Internet is also important for all clusters and is the most used information source for "well-being visitors". The information given by relatives and friends surprisingly does not play a significant role for "well-being visitors"; rather, it is much more widespread among "multifarious visitors". Other sources of information proved to be relatively less important for all clusters.

Two of the most important information sources—the Internet and brochures—were analysed in more detail to investigate if any differences occurred in their use between first-time and non-first-time visitors as well as regular and non-regular visitors (Table 3). Both first-time visitors and regular visitors use brochures as a source of information. First-time visitors range in the use of brochures from 40% for "well-being visitors" to 69% for "friends-oriented visitors". The data indicated that the Internet is used as an information source by both first-time visitors and regular ones. Moreover, brochures and the Internet are less important for regular visitors. Due to the very small number of regular visitors using brochures and the Internet in each cluster, these results should be taken with caution.

6 Conclusions and Implications

This paper presents an in-depth look into the information sources used by visitors looking for different benefits in Portorož. These visitors mostly look for information before they visit and primarily use a single information source, relying predominantly on the Internet and brochures. As in Dolnicar and Leisch's (2003) study, no significant differences were found in the current study concerning the use of the Internet. The difference between the two studies is that the Internet turned out to be a relatively unimportant source for tourists in winter in Austria whereas in our study it is one of the two most important sources of information. This may be explained by the 12-year lag between the two studies' data collection as Dolnicar and Leisch's study is based on data from winter 1997-1998. The shift is consistent with the development and use of the Internet in tourism promotion during the last decade (Kribel & Bojnec, 2007). No other research of information sources in tourism has yet been carried out in Slovenia or Portorož to the authors' knowledge. Furthermore, similar to Sarigollu and Huang's (2005) study, a statistically significant difference was found in the use of brochures among the segments. Therefore, brochures should be designed and delivered with consideration to their use in specific segments.

"Well-being visitors", representing the largest segment of visitors, rely on a much different structure of information sources, with the strongest source of information being brochures and the Internet. This segment seeks benefits connected with price convenience and health. Therefore, it is not surprising that this segment uses mostly information sources that are available free of charge. This finding may imply that brochures and their content should be more adapted to health and wellness characteristics of Portorož as well as to price promotion. The other three tourist segments have a much more similar structure of information sources that are also more evenly distributed among the different sources of information. Guidebooks, the most expensive source of information, has the highest share of use only among "curious passive visitors", visitors who show more interest in learning and fun (Nemec Rudež et al., 2011).

As expected, brochures and the Internet are more often used by first-time visitors than by regular visitors. Familiar-

Table 3. *Brochure and Internet Usage of First-time and Regular Visitors*

	Cluster 1 – Friends-oriented visitors	Cluster 2 – Well-being visitors	Cluster 3 – Curious passive visitors	Cluster 4 – Multifarious visitors
Usage of brochures				
First-time visit	9	35	5	7
% of all brochure users in the cluster	69 %	40 %	55 %	58 %
Regular visitors	2	22	3	3
% of all brochure users in the cluster	15 %	25 %	33 %	25 %
Usage of the Internet				
First-time visit	11	29	8	10
% of all Internet users in the cluster	52 %	43 %	42 %	58 %
Regular visitors	7	22	3	2
% of all Internet users in the cluster	33 %	33 %	16 %	11 %

Source: Authors' survey results

ity with the destination seems to play an important role regardless of the cluster. The use of the Internet ranges from 25.9% for "friends-oriented visitors" to 40.4% for "well-being visitors". This finding implies the need for upgrading the Internet as a source of information, using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The combination of the two most important information sources—brochures and the Internet—should be developed in the form of e-brochures and podcasts (digital media files) about Portorož. According to the sample results, media advertising Portorož, visits to tourist information offices in Slovenia, and fair attendance—all included in "other sources"—seem to be quite unimportant for the promotion of Portorož. Thus, advertising in traditional media and fair attendance can be replaced or redirected into new social media, thereby providing the advantage of a cost-effective source of information. It is also necessary to consider the fact that media preferences change over the seasons (Calantone & Johar, 1984).

In terms of managerial implications, a significant difference emerged in the structure of visitors using different information sources and their tourist expectations, which calls for adjustments in both tourist product supply and the promotion of the tourism destination to be more in line with tourists' expectations and demands.

Some scepticism arises regarding the comparisons of information flows with the changing structures from the past and the most recent possible differences between tourist seasons, as our results are limited only to a single season. Therefore, destination marketers should investigate preferred information sources in other seasons as well given that our study is limited solely to the spring season. Future research may also be extended to other seasons to examine the relationship of information sources and travellers' country of origin in order to better allocate information sources, marketing, and distribution channels.

Finally, among the limitations of the study, only foreign leisure visitors were included in the research. In addition, the study investigated visitors during spring, who could have specific characteristics. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all visitors to Portorož, particularly those in other seasons.

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