

Research paper

Does Digital Marketing really boost city tourism? Evidences from Porto's Experience

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Abstract

Purpose: This article analyses the digital marketing strategy of Porto City, aiming at providing a theoretical and practical contribution on the importance of digital marketing tools to promote tourist destinations.

Methodology: The current study applies the case-study methodology using two sets of data: (1) semi-structured focused interviews were carried out with tourists and key players on the promotion of Porto as tourism destination; (2) information available on the official websites of "Porto Destination" management entities. A model on Search Engine Marketing and display advertising applied to tourism is proposed.

Findings: We found that these are very effective tools when it comes to attracting traffic to the destination websites, and that are likely to successfully explain the efficiency of the online promotion of a place. Another relevant result is the importance of the customization, which can be attained through the qualification of users and through the collected data on their preferences, through social networks and feedback.

Originality/value: The originality of the study stems from the adoption of the theoretical determinants used, the proposed model of analysis and the different theoretical bodies from where the constructs and relations were pulled out. This way the paper provides a new way to approach the problem of marketing a touristic destination.

Research limitations: Due to the difficulty to motivate tourists to participate in the interviews, the main limitation of the study is the number of interviews conducted.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Tourist Destination, Online Promotion, Porto.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to examine the application of digital marketing in tourism. Travel destination information traditionally transmitted through personal storytelling and word-of-mouth has now been transformed into a global mass product due to the distribution power of the Internet (Dellarocas, 2003). According to the World Bank (2014), in 2013 there were 38.1 Internet users per 100 people. However, by 2020, the number of Internet connected devices is

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expected to reach 50 billion, which is 6.5 times higher than the world's population which is expected to reach 7.6 billion (PWC, 2014). This has resulted in an innovative technological mediation in tourism, which is recognized to have profound consequences for the management of tourist destinations (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Indeed, nowadays, tourists mainly plan their trips online. Consumers search for other consumers' opinions, interact and share ideas about a destination. Therefore, interactive websites that display tourism content are highly popular (Munar, 2012). This web activity increasingly based on consumer-to-consumer communication is changing consumption and production processes in tourism (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Tourist-generated content competes side by side with the destination management organizations (DMOs) that have traditionally been providers of destination-related information and knowledge (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). This new reality brings additional difficulties to the DMOs concerning the management and promotion of tourist destinations. DMOs must be able to remain relevant in the online channel to effectively reach tourists, with an appropriate digital marketing strategy.

Since travel and tourism is one of the largest sources of economic activity and one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries, providing millions of direct and indirect jobs, it is crucial for destinations to understand the best ways of promoting themselves (Madasu, 2013). As Social media plays a significant role in many aspects of tourism, especially in information search and decision-making, DMOs promotion must understand how to use this resource to leverage the city image and attractiveness, by focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). According to Uşaklı et al. (2017) DMOs do not use social media to their full potential, thus investigating DMOs usage of social media is of major importance to improve the effectiveness of the use of social media platforms to promote tourism destinations as social media has the ability to produce and influence tourists' expectations (Narangajavana et al., 2017).

The focus of this study is Porto, the second most important city in Portugal, which in 2012, 2014 and 2017 received the prize as the Best European Destination. Having Porto become a tourism destination the online channel is very relevant to tourists visiting the city. According to IPDT (Tourism Institute, 2014), 80% of tourists visiting Porto and Northern Portugal use the internet to obtain information about the city.

2. Literature Review and Model Development

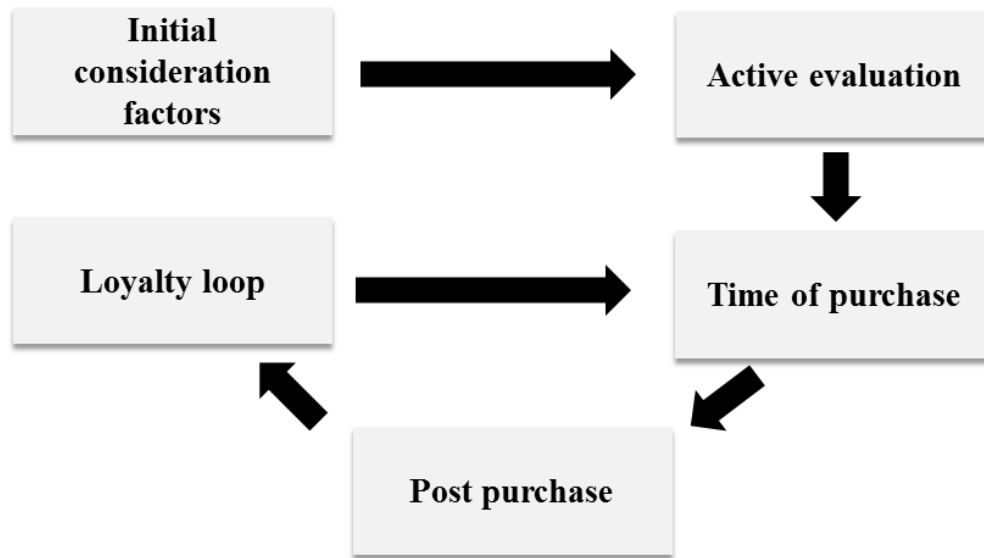
To explain the importance of digital marketing in promoting a tourist destination, it is important to study the linkage between the topics of tourism and digital marketing. In particular, it is important to study the digital marketing tools, channels and respective performance measures in order to be able to plan digital marketing strategies and campaigns to effectively promote a destination.

2.1. Tourism

Tourism has registered a continuous growth and it has become a major player in international trade and crucial resource for some countries and regions. The World Tourism Organization reports that tourism will continue to grow worldwide at a rate of 3.3% per year, with more than 40 to 43 million tourists by 2030 (PWC, 2014). One visible consequence of the recognition of the importance of tourism has been the branding and promotion of cities, regions and countries as true tourist products (Kotler, Rein & Haider 1993; Ashworth & Goodall 1990).

Many cities, particularly in Europe, have adopted promotion policies to strengthen their image and competitiveness with other cities (Ward 1998; Kotler et al 1999) and the cities that do not adopt these policies risk stagnation and decline (Kotler et al. 1999). Tourism organizations which do adapt their strategy to include social media will lack a competitive advantage (Schegg et al., 2008; Stankov et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2002). According to the consumer's decision process defined by Court et al. (2009), several stages can be identified, whereby the promotion strategy can intercept and influence the consumer (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Consumer Decision Journey



Source: Court et al. (2009).

Based on Figure 1 and applying the outline provided to the tourism industry, the choice of tourist destination can be divided into four stages: initial consideration factors (the consumer considers travelling based on their perception and information they have on several destinations and they make an initial selection); active evaluation (the consumer evaluates the selected destinations and obtains more information about it); time of purchase (the consumer decides the destination, driven/influenced by the destination or opportunity); and, finally, based on the experience at the destination (post purchase experience) consumers decide whether or not to recommend the destination and consider returning (loop loyalty). The consumer's initial decision may be influenced by feedback on the web and the web will be equally predominant in the establishment of the loyalty loop and the influencing of peers. Hence, the management of the online presence of a destination is relevant as the tourist's experience is closely related to the search for information (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012).

2.2. Digital Marketing and Digital Marketing Channels

The concept of digital marketing has changed over the years, to adapt to technological advances and the increasing interest and relevance of the area (see Table 1).

Table 1. Digital marketing definition

Author	Definition
Chaffey et al. (2003)	Digital marketing includes the use of the internet and related digital technologies to achieve marketing goals.
Kotler et al. (2009)	Digital marketing is a form of communication and interaction between organizations and their customers through digital channels (internet, email, and others) and digital technologies.
Smith (2010)	Digital marketing is the practice of promoting products and services through distribution in digital channels. Digital marketing is also referred as e-marketing and includes digital advertising online.

Source: Own elaboration.

From table 1 we can conclude that the definitions are much similar, and that digital marketing has its roots on the development of Internet and digital technologies and its main aim is to achieve marketing goals.

Studies confirm that consumers have developed negative attitudes towards digital marketing they consider intrusive (Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002; McCoy, Everard, Polak, & Galletta, 2007; Ranchhod, 2007). Therefore, there is a need to identify the most effective digital marketing techniques to promote a destination, attracting and involving tourists/ users, rather than annoying them.

Even though one of the tools that can be identified as essential for promoting a destination online is a website, because it is the platform where tourists can obtain detailed information about the destination, it is necessary to combine a mix of digital marketing channels that can guide tourists to the official destination page and encourage them to become more familiar with a destination. According to Chaffey et al. (2008) there are six main online channels for traffic building:

- Search marketing: Use different approaches to improve a site’s listing in search engines including search engine optimization (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) or paid search. SEO includes optimization actions by editing content and HTML code (Hypertext markup language) to increase the relevance of website for certain keywords. SEO is divided into two areas: optimizing on-page (actions to make website SEF (Search Engine Friendly) and off-page optimization (link building).
- Online PR: Online PR aims to maximize favorable mentions of companies, brands, products or websites on third-party websites, blogs and social networks that are likely to be visited by the target audience.
- Online sponsorship; is a long-term arrangement to associate a brand with a site, or part of a site to promote online services on third-party websites. Three types of online partnerships can be identified: link-building, affiliate marketing and online sponsorship.
- Interactive advertising: Involves clicking on an interactive banner or a static ad at a site which redirects the user to the destination website of the company which paid for the advertising.

– **Opt-in e-mail:** It a form of direct communication. It is essential that e-mail is opt-in, otherwise it may be considered as illegal SPAM. Include cold e-mail (rented), co-branded e-mails and placements in third-party e-mails, e-newsletters and e-mail campaigns. It’s essential to achieve the correct frequency, and give customers the choice to opt-out.

– **Viral Marketing:** With viral techniques, traffic is either built through e-mail (virtual word-of-mouth) or real-world word-of-mouth to spread the message from one person to the next. To make a viral campaign successful, three things are needed: creative material – the ‘viral agent’ (this includes the creative message or offer and how it is spread-text, image, video; seeding (identifying websites, blogs or people to send e-mail to start the virus spreading) and tracking (to monitor the effect and to assess the return from the cost of developing the viral agent and seeding).

According to Chaffey and Bosomworth (2014), traffic building should always include a component of social media marketing, which is the management of social presence, viral campaigns and consumer feedback. In fact, social media is a relevant channel, because according to a US study (Travelers, 2013), 1 in 3 travelers refers to social networks as the main source of travel ideas and inspiration.

2.3. *Measuring Digital Marketing*

Objective and effective metrics are crucial for business evaluation (Kotler et al., 2009). About the performance measurements of the digital channels, Vaughan (2012) classifies the most relevant as the search engine marketing (SEO and paid search), email marketing and social media marketing channels (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table2. Performance measures for SEO and paid search

Channel	Measure	Definition
SEO	Keyword Performance	Check ranking in the search engine for each keyword.
	Total traffic from organic search	The percentage of unique visitors who arrive at our site from a link on a search engine results page.
	Inbound links	A measure of the number of links back to our site from other sites on the web.
	Conversion rates from organic search	The percentage of visitors who arrived at our site through organic search and completed a desired conversion action, such as becoming a lead or purchasing a product.
Paid search	CTR (Click- Through Rate)	The percentage of the audience that viewed our ad and actually clicked on the link provided, calculated by dividing total clicks by the number of impressions
	CPC (Cost Per Click)	The amount we are paying for each click on a specific search ad.
	Conversion rate	The percentage of visitors who completed a desired action (e.g., product purchase or lead generation form completion) after clicking on one of our PPC ads.
	CPA (Cost Per Acquisition)	A measurement of how much we are spending on PPC advertising for each conversion.

Source: Vaughan (2012).

Table 3. Performance measures for email marketing and social media marketing

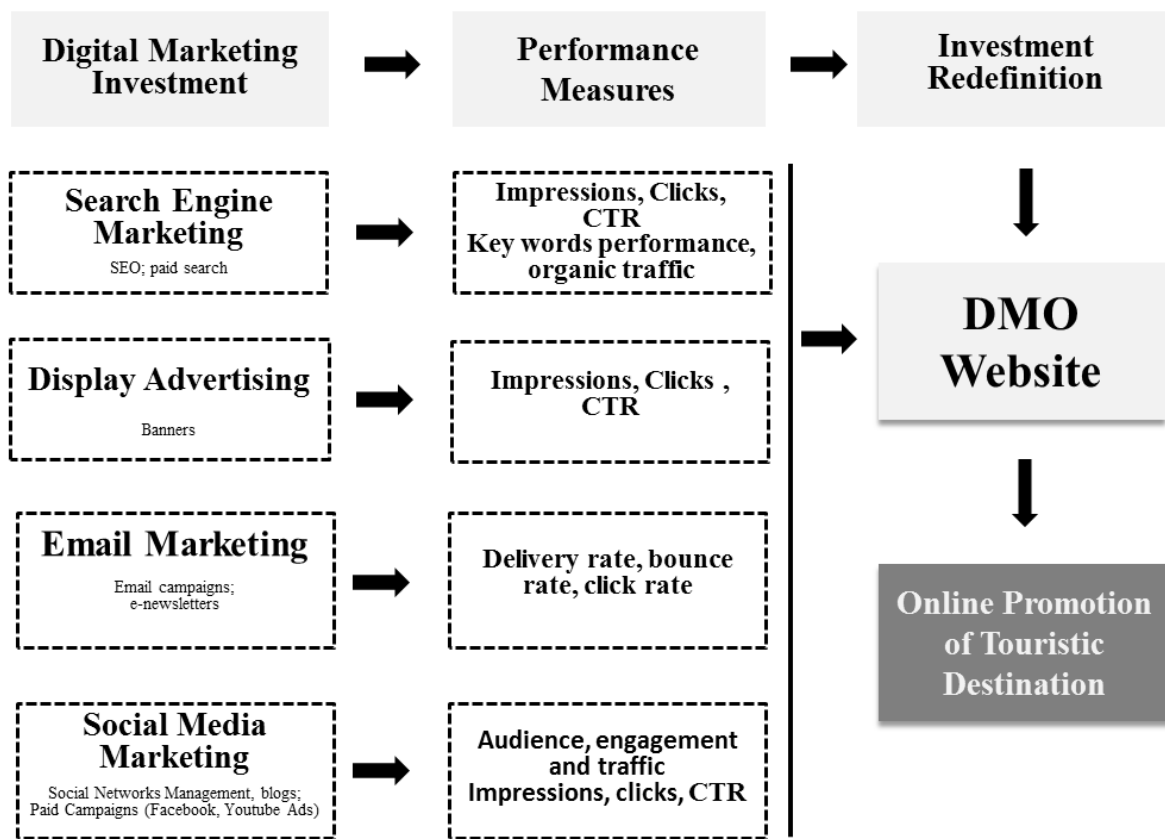
Channel	Measure	Definition
Email marketing	Bounce rate	The percentage of total emails sent that could not be delivered to the recipient's inbox, known as a "bounce".
	Delivery rate	The percentage of emails that were actually delivered to recipients' inboxes, calculated by subtracting hard and soft bounces from the gross number of emails sent, then dividing that number by gross emails sent.
	CTR (Click- Through Rate)	The proportion of the audience who clicked on one more links contained in an email message.
	Conversion rate	The percentage of recipients who clicked on a link within an email and completed a desired action.
Social media marketing	Audience and reach	The total number of people engaging with our brand in social media channels, such as Facebook "Likes", Twitter followers, LinkedIn Group members, blog subscribers, YouTube channel subscribers, etc.
	Engagement	The number of interactions generated in social media channels, as measured by metrics such as: Facebook "Likes" (AKA fans), Retweets and replies on Twitter, Blog comments, Facebook Page comments, YouTube video views.
	Traffic	The percentage of unique visitors to our website that comes from social media.
	Conversion rate	The percentage of visitors from social media that convert into lead or customers.

Source: Vaughan (2012).

Concerning interactive advertising (display advertising) the performance measure is the click rate, which reveals the active response of users to the advertising (Nielsen, 2011). Click rate is known as CTR (Click Through Rate) and it is calculated by dividing total clicks by the number of impressions (visualizations of banner).

Because measuring and comparing results for different digital marketing actions using different analytics platforms can be tedious and challenging, it is important to have a conceptual framework to consolidate analytics efforts and easily compare cross-channel metrics to one another (Vaughan, 2012). Accordingly, we propose the following model of analysis (see Figure 2) that makes use of the different theoretical inputs to propose a set links among the different constructs in a way that, in our opinion, assists decision-makers to decide on how to promote and evaluate the tourism destination promotional activities throughout the use of digital marketing.

Figure 2. Online Promotion of Tourist Destination



Source: Authors.

This model assumes that online channels are the principal source for acquiring information and motivation to select a destination. Hence digital marketing is a relevant channel to promote a destination, with the website at the center of the entire digital marketing strategy, as it aggregates of all the information about the destination (events, places to visit, tours, news and articles). Therefore, it is necessary to catalyze efforts in digital marketing for increased website traffic.

The proposed model does not consider all the channels suggested by Chaffey et al. (2008): PR online, online partnerships and viral marketing. Public relations online and online partnerships are complementary, and they are directly related with the social media marketing channel (Chaffey and Bosomworth, 2014) and search engine marketing (optimization of content and connection to third-party websites). The viral marketing channel is also related to SEO, because only relevant content is able to generate online word of mouth.

All digital marketing actions should be subject to monitoring and for this it is important to identify performance measures for each channel. Vaughan (2012) proposes a series of measures for each channel, however we have excluded conversion measures, because in the case of tourism promotion by the DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) there is no actual sale. In order to compare data more easily, we have chosen the CTR measure for all the channels analyzed. All other measures suggested by Vaughan (2012) were integrated into the model. The proposed model will be tested with data gathered for Porto city to have a better understanding on how digital marketing can contribute to the promotion of a city as a tourism destination.

3. Research Design

Nowadays, digital marketing is a well-studied subject, but needs further evidences of its application to tourism (Hayes et al., 2013) which calls for the use of the case-study methodology. Case studies are a very efficient tool for research that aims to explore, describe or explain a given case or situation. This tool allows researchers to acquire in-depth knowledge about a specific reality, making possible to understand a given situation or phenomenon from various perspectives (Yin, 2003). Yin (2004) believes that through different analyses and observations, supported by several information sources (interviews, documents, observations) one can carry out a more thorough study, which will probably provide more robust findings. By entailing a more extensive research methodology, with various stages of data collection and analysis and interpretation of the information resulting from the qualitative methods employed this methodology produce valuable knowledge for theory and practitioners (Latorre, 2003). Considering that the case study is the recommended research method when the research poses questions like “how” and “why” (Yin 2009), we consider it to be the most appropriate option for the current investigation, using both primary and secondary data. Concerning the primary data, direct observation and interviews were used to gather the information. For that, semi-structured or focused interviews were carried out, as these are more flexible (Dane, 2010) and allow the researcher to better understand the interviewee’s point of view (Daymon & Holloway, 2002).

In what concerns the secondary data, we analyzed the data available on the website, studies, reports and communication plans from the official entities of “Porto Destination”. The process was divided into several phases. During the first stage, Porto’s profile as a destination and the profile of its tourists were reviewed through the analysis of websites, documents and interviews carried out with tourists that visited Porto City Council’s Tourist Information Centre. Afterwards, the organizations in charge of promoting Porto as a tourist destination were analyzed through interviews. On average, the interviews last approximately 20 minutes each, were performed in English and took place in January 2015 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Profile of the Respondents

# Respondents	Age	Gender	Nationality	Type
#1	25	Male	German	Tourist
#2	69	Female	Spanish	Tourist
#3	57	Female	German	Tourist
#4	51	Female	French	Tourist
#5	47	Male	French	Tourist
#6	38	Female	Portuguese	APDT Manager

Source: Authors.

Lastly, we evaluated the digital marketing campaigns of 2013 and 2014, through the data and reports available from the company StepValue, which was the marketing company hired to design the campaigns. This analysis, combined with the testimonials collected during the interviews reinforces the analysis made in the literature review, aimed to understand which digital marketing techniques or channels were more efficient in promoting Porto and how these individually or together were able to contribute towards promoting the destination.

4. Case Study: Porto

The data revealed by Porto's Tourist Association in December 2014 confirmed that the City of Porto and the North of Portugal recorded 2.6 million overnight stays by foreigners between January and October 2014, a 13.8% increase when compared to the same period of 2013. The goal for 2014 was to increase the number of overnight stays by 150 thousand, however this goal was doubled by October.

More recently Porto has stood out as a popular destination on the tourist's map, and 2014 was the best year ever. Porto was nominated the "Best European Destination 2014" by the European Best Destinations organization, topping destinations such as Budapest, Milan, Madrid, Berlin and Rome.

In 2013, Porto had already experienced a true tourism boom, but 2014 and the following years turned out to be even better. The quality of the promotion, the fact that it is considered a safe destination and the good price-quality ratio are all important factors highlighted by those who visit the region (StepValue, 2014). Regarding its ranking as a tourist product, Porto is viewed mainly as a city-break destination, which usually means a short-stay to visit several attractions in a city where monuments, places of cultural interest, commercial landmarks and good restaurants and bars with traditional food can be enjoyed. Porto's tourist strategy is part of a wider strategy – that of the North of Portugal, which in turn is part of Portugal's tourist strategy.

Interviewee #6, who is manager at ATP (Porto's Tourism Association) said that ATP is responsible for promoting Porto and the North as a destination in the international market. In another level, the Porto City Council's tourism department serves the purpose of welcoming and informing Porto's visitors, but also the purpose of promoting the destination, mainly inwards. The tourism department has a site and a social media presence and develops promotional activity on specific holidays throughout the year (St. John's, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day and Carnival) with a significant emphasis on the use of digital marketing tools. Interviewee #6 also revealed that digital marketing still has not reached the desired objectives, due to the limited budget at its disposal: "Digital marketing emerges as the third asset in terms of promotional investment." The priorities regarding promotion revolve around support to airline routes and partnerships with tourist agents, but: "we have been witnessing an increase in online channel investments."

According to the IPDT's (Portuguese Institute for Tourism Development) director interviewed 80% of all the tourists that visited Porto for the first time had searched for information on the Internet. In our own research, we have interview 5 tourists (see Table 4) that visit Porto's Tourist Information Centre which state that the main source used to look for information about Porto was "*the internet, especially through Google's search engine, but also through websites, tourism apps, Booking and TripAdvisor*". Two of them also referred tourism magazines (paper format) and "friends" as sources of information.

During 2013 and 2014, the ATP (in its role as Regional Agency for the Promotion of Tourism in Porto and in the North of Portugal) and the tourism department of Porto's City Council developed a digital marketing plan to promote Porto as tourism destination. It should be noted that investment in digital marketing only started in 2013, so in this period both organizations were at the beginning of the learning curve. In addition, it is important also to mention that ATP directs its investments towards the international market and the tourism department of Porto towards the internal market (mainly to Lisbon).

Concerning 2013, apart from the search engine marketing campaigns (paid search), display advertising and social media marketing (Facebook Ads), the focus of the digital marketing strategy was the development of a new website for international promotion.

Online since September 2013, this new website represented an innovative approach, giving greater relevance to the visual component of the destination and to the user’s experience by promoting the interconnection of variables such as tourist product, tourist’s motivation, special offers from partners and related contents. The investment was distributed considering the relevance of each market. The bigger the relevance of that particular market, the bigger the level of investment. For each market, a set of cities was chosen, and the messages, were designed taking into account the tourist profile of each location, and the language and cultural aspects of the target market. The deployment of the campaign was made using a PPC (pay per click) strategy with both text and image ads, shown in search results, social media sites and affiliate sites, directing traffic to the website www.visitportoandnorth.travel.

The chosen platforms were Google (search and display) and Facebook (Facebook Ads). The results of the city-break digital marketing campaign are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. City-break digital marketing campaign results

Channel	Year	Impressions (*)	Clicks (*)	CTR (*)
Facebook Ads	2013	9970036	2376	0,02%
Paid Search + Display	2013	1891662	7688	0,41%
Display	2014	7218204	21270	0,29%
YouTube Ads	2014	2648	342	12,91%

Source: StepValue (2015).

In 2013, Google (through paid search and display techniques) offered better CTR than Facebook. In 2014, the strategies used were display ads and YouTube Ads. The YouTube campaign stood out due to the higher CTR obtained.

Additionally, the construction and release of the new tool within the website (“Be Inspired”) was one of the main advances implemented during 2014. The objective was to collect information about the profiles of the website users and potential tourists of the region. This new tool allowed the tourist to design a personal tour considering the offers in the Porto City and the new trends in tourism. It is also relevant to point out that in specific periods throughout the year (St. John’s, Christmas, New Year’s Eve, Valentine’s Day and Carnival) some promotional activities are developed, focusing not only on display channels and paid search but also on e-mail marketing campaigns, which reinforce the destination’s notoriety.

Because of the 2014 promotional activity the visits to the web portal www.portoandnorth.travel had a 40% increase when compared to 2013, keeping the positive tendency of the two previous years (see Table 6).

Table 6. Traffic of www.visitportoandnorth.travel's website by digital marketing campaign

Channel	Year	Traffic (%)
Facebook Ads	2013	1.97%
Paid Search + Display	2013	25.53%
Display	2014	36.68%
YouTube Ads	2014	2.01%
Organic Search (through SEO techniques)	2014	38.40%

Source: StepValue (2015).

This tendency was also registered in the number of page views. On the other hand, the number of pages per visit recorded a small decrease, as well as the time spent on the website, which diminished by 11 seconds.

Looking at the origins of the traffic, in 2014, organic searches were the main traffic generator for the website traffic, with a share of 38.40% - much above the 7% recorded in 2013 (see Table 7).

Table 7. Website Performance (visitportoandnorth.travel)

Channel	Percentage (2013)	Percentage (2014)
Not set	42.56%	-
Paid search	16.2%	-
Other	13.65%	1.59%
Display	9.33%	36.68%
Organic Search	7.00%	38,40%
Referral	4.85%	10.23%
Direct	4.38%	10.78%
Social	1.97%	2.01%
Email	0.14%	0.31%

Source: StepValue (2015).

This increase could have been the result of a study developed by the entities aimed at understanding which were the most searched keywords in each strategic target market, but could also have resulted from the new website developed in the previous year. For the success of this last vector, the new navigation architecture available in the new portal made a substantial contribution, since it offered users a more coherent and effective experience, better tuned to his/her expectations.

The paid display campaigns of 2014 appear in second place, following closely behind, with 36.68% of the total visits. The traffic from external links (referral) also improved, and accounted for more than 10% of the visits. Throughout Google Analytics it was also possible to observe that Google was the main source for visits (more than 50%), both through organic

searches and paid tactics. Regarding the origin of traffic, it is also important to note that a quarter of the website’s visits originated from mobile devices (see Table 8).

Table 8. Visitportoandnorth.travel traffic distribution per device

Device	Traffic (%)
Desktop	76.20%
Mobile	13.25%
Tablet	10.55%

Source: StepValue (2014).

Regarding the presence on social media web sites, it is particularly important to examine its Facebook page (www.facebook.com/visitporto.portal). This page evolved from an initial phase of mere notoriety to more active participation by its users. The Facebook page allowed a relationship with influencers and online opinion makers to be created, converting the most loyal clients into brand ambassadors, obtaining insights on their, behavior through the feedback from actual and potential tourists.

5. Conclusions and Final Remarks

In the near future and after the initial tourism boom, is expected that tourism growth rates at Porto will decrease and become stagnant. Nonetheless, the promotion of the destination must continue, since they have a decisive role in minimizing the volatile nature of tourism demand by attracting new publics (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). The current findings show that if a destination manages to make use of the most effective digital channels to target new tourists and promote the return and recommendation of those who are already familiar with the destination, may substantially increase the number of visitors, which is in line with previous findings by Narangajavana et al. (2017). Given that digital platforms are a privileged place to obtain information about a destination as pointed by Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil (2017) and as current results have also shown, a strong presence online is a crucial element for any tourism promotion strategy. Therefore, it is essential to understand which digital marketing tools are more effective to reach the target market to ensure the steady flow of tourists, and proceed on integration of social media into an all-inclusive marketing strategy targeting specific niche tourist groups rather than general social media users, by embracing a personalized information-based social media tourism marketing strategy as discussed by Matloka & Buhalis (2010) and Tham (2013).

Considering the data available on Porto’s case, we conclude that the investment in digital marketing is not yet the main priority for Porto DMOs, and that the investment is below the desired due to the limited global budget that the entities responsible for the destination’s promotion have available. Evidences of a viable return of investment on the integration of social media with tourism business processes are needed to support high levels of investment, backed by clear and measurable indicators of its performance. Future research must focus on provide solid evidences on the impacts of social media on a wider number of tourism components, such as tourist numbers, revenues, changing travel patterns, spending behavior, and on the economic return of investment in social media usage by tourism industry.

Despite the challenges imposed to the evaluation of social media in Tourism the results from the interviews carried out with the responsible for ATP suggest that DMOs managers are

conscious of the importance of the digital channels evidenced by the increase in the investment made in online channels. Through the analysis of the campaigns carried out by Porto city, it was observed that despite all the efforts and channels used, Google remains as the main source of traffic for the destination's website, which is in accordance with previous findings (e.g. Welbourne & Grant, 2016). Thus, it can be concluded that the investment in SEO techniques, paid search and display ads remain as the most efficient strategy for the digital marketing strategy of a city as a tourist destination.

According to the interviews carried out with tourists, it is concluded that the preferential means for promoting the destination throughout the display of ads are tourism-related websites, online agents and tourist operators, online specialized search engines devoted to tourism activities (hotels and flights) and social media network sites on tourism. This last category tends to be considered more reliable when compared to information provided by government-sponsored tourism websites (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). This is an important insight for the managers of [http:// visitportandnorth.travel](http://visitportandnorth.travel) website, which it is the center of all the digital marketing strategy as it aggregates all the relevant content about Porto. Furthermore, there is the need to adapt the websites for the mobile experience is evident, since the data from tourists indicated that mobile is becoming the privileged way for visitors to access tourism related information, supporting previous research by Li et al. (2017). In relation to the social media network sites, DMOs managers objectives should focus on expanding the integration of virtual and augmented reality technologies with geographic information systems on mobile devices apps to make more appealing and ease the access to information on tourist attractions, local culture, scenery, and shopping as these can enhance the experience of the visit (Zarzueta et al., 2013).

Additionally, paid campaigns and games on social media networks should be introduced at strategic times throughout the year, encouraging interaction and involvement with the destination. In accordance with Zeng and Gerritsen (2014), we were also able to conclude that customization of the offer is extremely important, because tourists wants to feel that they can have an exclusive experience that relate to their initial expectations. In this sense, tourism websites should move towards offering visitors an experience that allows them to quickly find what they are looking for or what is more suitable to their interests. By making use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems, tourism web portals should be able to recognize the user e-profile, and in real-time design an offer in line with the user needs, desires and expectations. In the present case an elementary version of such a system already exists and was titled "Be inspired". The data collected through this tool is used to tailor the offer to users of the portal.

The current investigation provides further evidences that the SEM techniques are very important for tourism destinations online promotion, as well as the ads, which had already been highlighted by Chaffey et al. (2008). The results also highlight also the importance of social media networks campaigns pointing underlining that e-mail marketing is particularly relevant at specific times and contexts throughout the year. All the findings underline the usefulness of the proposed model as a proper framework to evaluate the online promotion of a tourism destination. The adoption of the theoretical determinants pulled out from different theoretical contexts, and the associations among them, for use in the proposed framework is innovative in a way that assists and guides decision-makers to decide on how to best promote a tourist destination using digital marketing tools. Thus, the article provides a structured new method to approach the problem of marketing a touristic destination, where the insights from the Porto case-study may be used to evaluate other experiences and establishing a first step in the development of a consistent theory back the analysis of the online efforts to promote a place as a sustainable tourism destination.

Regardless of the strengths and interest of the current study, some limitations must be pointed out. One of the main limitations of the study is the novelty of some elements analyzed, particularly those relating to identifying the most effective techniques and channels in promoting a tourist destination. Also, the small number of interviews conducted should be considered when exploring the findings. We must also point out that only one case was studied, that of the city of Porto, which demands for a careful interpretation. Consequently, future research should focus on test the current framework or to propose changes to it by adding further indications from different experiences on the promotion of cities as tourism destinations.

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