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Floričić, Tamara; Šker, Irena; Maras Benassi, Hermina

Source / Izvornik: **Business Systems Research : International journal of the Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy, 2023, 14, 72 - 92**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.2478/bsrj-2023-0004>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:191:051713>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-03-16**



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Enhancing Digital Promotion of Cultural Attractions: Assessing Websites, Online Marketing Tools and Smart Technologies

Tamara Floričić

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković", Croatia

Irena Šker

University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Opatija, Croatia

Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković", Croatia

Hermína Maras Benassi

University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Portorož, Slovenia

Abstract

Background: Built heritage in developed tourism destinations presents a resource of attractiveness, and its presentation through digital technology impacts the perception of culture. **Objectives:** The paper aims to determine opportunities for further development of digital promotion of cultural attractions by identifying the potential of websites, online marketing tools and smart technologies implemented by tourism attraction decision-makers. **Methods/Approach:** Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used as longitudinal research and structured interviews with decision-makers of the tourist destination. **Results:** Positive developments in implementing the digital promotion of cultural heritage during and after the pandemic are evident, but not fast enough considering the accelerated development of new smart technologies. At the same time, decision-makers recognise the importance of the digital promotion of cultural heritage. However, they are still unfamiliar with the possibilities of smart technology to affirm the digital promotion of cultural heritage. **Conclusions:** The paper points to the conclusion of how the advantages and potentials of developing a smart culture in destinations, recognised as a strategic policy of development, are implemented in the digital marketing of heritage sites.

Keywords: Heritage buildings, Technologies, Online promotion, Smart destination

JEL classification: I25, O3, Z32

Paper type: Research article

Received: 2 Jan 2023

Accepted: 24 Apr 2023

Citation: Floričić, T., Šker, I. & Maras Benassi, H. (2023). Enhancing Digital Promotion of Cultural Attractions: Assessing Websites, Online Marketing Tools and Smart Technologies. *Business Systems Research*, 14(1), 72-92.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/bsrj-2023-0004>

Introduction

In times of accelerated development of ICT technology, where traditional marketing tools are substituted by modern e-marketing, implementing smart technology in promoting cultural heritage is becoming a catalyst of experiences of affirm tourists' curiosity and interest. Tourism attractions are the main natural and anthropogenic resource bases representing the key factor of tourism development. However, as society and tourism are developing in times of fast experiential transience, where searching for new experiences is of the utmost importance, an accelerated trend is evident of digital affirmation of the promotion of tourist attractions (Floričić et al., 2022). This is developed in the domain and context of smart destinations, where culture, sustainability, accessibility, and technologies synergistically blend. In the paper, using the comparative longitudinal study of the evaluation of digital promotion of selected attractions of the Town of Poreč in 2018, 2020 and 2022, the implementation is analysed of modern tourism trends, which include technology, heritage evaluation and sustainable development. Based on the obtained data, the paper aims to consider shifts and possibilities of even better tourism evaluation of the entire destination employing digital promotion. Therefore, five cultural tourism attractions of tourist destinations have been selected and explored. The study included the analysis of improvement progress during the three biennial periods, i.e., the observed six-year period and the perspectives for the future.

Promoting tourist attractions is expected to have room for a more substantial application of smart technologies. Considering the collected attitudes of decision-makers, they are expected to continuously indicate the existence of implementation plans and trend monitoring in that direction.

This will also help to identify the problem area which affects heritage sites formed as tourist attractions. Therefore, the study includes research on the perception and the attitudes of the tourism destination promotion, namely destination decision makers from the supply side, including destination governance, the county tourism board, destination management organisations and cultural attraction managers. The results indicate new knowledge and contribute to the topic's scientific and practical context. The questions are articulated as follows:

- Q1. What are the possibilities of promoting cultural attractions through website elements?
- Q2. What are the developments in website elements for the digital promotion of cultural attractions over six years?
- Q3. Are decision makers utilising the opportunities and recognising the importance of digital promotion, online marketing tools, and smart technologies in promoting cultural attractions?"

The qualitative and quantitative methodology used in this research includes the study of professional and scientific literature, Internet website search and comparison of the obtained data with statistical processing.

The paper is structured in four main parts. The first introductory chapter presents the theoretical framework and literature review of the research topics of the paper, while the second chapter describes the methodology and research design. The third chapter presents the research results and discussion, followed by conclusive remarks in the fourth chapter. Besides them, it includes the study's limitations and perspective for future research and the contribution of this longitudinal research that innovatively approaches the topic.

Theory and literature review

Cultural attractions and impact on smart destination development

Kušen (2002) defines tourist attractions as elements that can or are already luring tourists to visit the destination where they are staying. In continuance, he differentiates anthropogenic attractions, which are developed from the basic cultural resources and enters the domain of cultural tourism:

- Cultural and historical heritage (cultural monuments, archaeological sites, urban protected areas, old towns, castles and churches)
- Cultural and religious buildings (museums, theatres, pilgrimage centres)
- Events (festivals and theatre plays)
- Work-life balance culture (gastronomy, local population's lifestyle, ethnicity, folklore, tradition, and handicraft).

Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) diversify attractions as natural, recreational, cultural, event and entertainment attractions. Valorisation is related to accessibility where marked physical and public access via various transportation means is considered. On public surfaces and roads, attractions are marked by so-called "brown signposting," according to international standards, and pedestrian and similar roads have special signposts. The use of tourist attractions is achieved primarily through sightseeing with the aim of education and leisure through recreation and well-being. Looking from the financial aspect, access to a tourist attraction can be free or with a charge for an entrance ticket. That can be organised at information points where attractions' information can be found, sanitary points, interpretation boards, souvenir shops, printed brochures, flyers and multimedia materials, virtual animations and technological innovations (Floričić & Floričić, 2019).

Attractions can be fitted with specific equipment (Kušen, 2002). Depending on the tourism attraction, including ambient light, sound, tactile elements and other sensory experiences (Floričić, 2016).

This is why stakeholders, the local government destination management organisations (DMOs) and other stakeholders should consider the affirmation potential of the resources and classify and evidence it in the map of tourism attractions. It should be evaluated as the basis for the performance of synergic action and the development of marketing placement and promotion strategies in the tourism market. Tourist boards, whose role in the tourism system is primarily promotional, informative, and educational, have that key role. Križman Pavlović and Živolić (2008) emphasised the importance of cooperation between destination stakeholders and the formation of strategic, coordinated marketing in the placement of tourism products.

The promotion goals in tourism are often stated as the AIDA model and relate to the drawing of attention (*attract*), creation of interest (*interest*), activating of desire (*desire*) and encouraging action (*action*) (Jakovljević, 2011).

The experience economy, as an experience melting pot, assumes a dominant position in creating demand. Offer stakeholders should increase the value for consumers and create unforgettable experiences through the 4E elements: entertaining, educational, escapist, and aesthetic, form special services and programmes through the implementation of co-creation and stress Pine and Gilmore (2000). Furthermore, numerous authors deal with the topic of special experience in tourism. Williams (2006), Loureiro (2014), and Kim et al. (2012) explore the experience economy, presenting it as a recognition factor in the achievement of competitiveness in tourism (Kunst, 2009; Jurin, 2016). When considering promotional aspects, the predominant significance of digital promotion is elaborated.

Digital promotion of cultural attractions involves using online channels and technologies to promote cultural attractions, such as museums, galleries, historical sites, and cultural events. It is a growing trend in the tourism industry as more people use digital platforms to research and plan their travel experiences.

Several authors have written about the importance of digital promotion for cultural attractions. Miguéns et al. (2008) argue that digital marketing is essential for attracting visitors to cultural destinations, enabling a wider reach and more targeted promotion. They highlight the importance of creating engaging online content, such as virtual tours and multimedia exhibits, to provide a taste of the cultural attraction and encourage visitors to come in person.

Pine and Gilmore (2000) discuss creating memorable customer experiences. He suggests that cultural attractions can use digital technologies to enhance the visitor experience, for example, by providing interactive exhibits, augmented reality features, and personalised recommendations based on visitor interests. Neuhofer et al. (2015; 2019) have written extensively about the potential of digital technologies to transform the tourist experience. They argue that cultural attractions can use digital channels to offer seamless and personalised experiences for visitors by providing relevant information and recommendations through mobile apps, social media, and other digital platforms.

Moreover, Hudson et al. (2016) investigate the role of social media in shaping consumer-brand relationships. They suggest that cultural attractions can leverage social media platforms to engage with potential visitors, showcase their offerings, and foster a sense of community among visitors. Gretzel et al. (2000) examine the revolutionary transformations brought about by technology in the tourism industry. They argue that cultural attractions, such as virtual reality and gamification features, can use digital technologies to provide immersive and interactive experiences for visitors.

These authors highlight the importance of digital promotion for cultural attractions, as it enables wider reach, targeted promotion, and enhanced visitor experiences. Cultural attractions can attract more visitors using digital channels and technologies effectively, providing more engaging experiences and increasing their impact on local economies and communities.

Websites play a crucial role in the digital promotion of cultural attractions. A well-designed and optimised website can effectively attract potential visitors, provide detailed information about the attraction, and enhance the overall visitor experience. Boniface and Cooper (2001) argue that websites are essential for cultural attractions to promote themselves effectively to potential visitors. They highlight the importance of providing accurate and detailed information about exhibits, events, and opening hours and creating engaging content, such as virtual tours and multimedia exhibits. Buhalis and Law (2008) discuss the role of websites in destination marketing and how they can be used to provide a more personalised and interactive experience for visitors. They suggest that cultural attractions can use websites to offer online ticketing, provide visitor feedback mechanisms, and create social networking communities around their attractions.

Kock and Josiassen (2009) argue that websites are an important component of destination branding for cultural attractions. They suggest that a well-designed website can help to create a distinct and memorable brand identity and can be used to showcase the unique features of the attraction. Fesenmaier and Xiang (2010) discuss the importance of search engine optimisation (SEO) for destination marketing. They argue that a well-optimised website can help improve cultural attractions'

visibility in search engine results, making it easier for potential visitors to find them online.

Kolb (2012) emphasises the importance of websites for cultural attractions to engage with potential visitors and create a positive brand image. They suggest that websites should be designed with the visitor in mind and provide relevant and engaging content to encourage visitors to explore the attraction further. In continuance, Wang (2022) emphasises the importance of website design, its components, its influence on UX, and website user experience. He introduces the relevant web design situation and then analyses the key elements in web design, such as visual elements and their innovative applications. Also, Neuhofer et al. (2019) discuss the role of websites in providing seamless and personalised visitor experiences. They suggest that cultural attractions can use websites to provide relevant information and recommendations to visitors based on their interests and preferences and to facilitate online ticketing and other services that improve the visitor experience. Furthermore, Cyr (2014) elaborates on how website design can engender visitors' loyalty and impact return visits.

Smart technologies and cultural attractions

As a result of the accelerated development of technologies, in the past several decades, changes have penetrated all the business and communication spheres in tourism (Atembe, 2016; Smart Tourism, 2020). They are reflected in digital transformation, the use of mobile appliances, applications and social networks, by which opportunities are also opening for innovations in the tourism business, ensuring possibilities of adaptation for specific market requirements (UNWTO, 2020, 2021). For example, QR codes are used in promotion, scanning of which facilitates the opening of websites or interactive content with specific information about attractions, events or other useful pieces of advice. The importance of virtual technologies is stressed: AR - augmented reality and VR – virtual reality technologies. Google Glass is highlighted as a hands-free appliance similar to glasses, which can be connected to the Internet and thus connect with other appliances. It is voice-activated and, among other functions, can send messages, take photographs, make recordings and others, and has found a useful way of use during certain promotional processes (Google, 2020). Technologies open numerous possibilities, not only because of the efficiency of specific simplified methods of use and finding of information but also due to the originality. In other words, novelty is presented to visitors, stimulating their interest and attractiveness for certain products and services, especially if introduced to competitors (Boes et al., 2015). An increased number of applications facilitate, improve, or, in some other way, affect the visits to smart destinations (European Commission, 2020). Spain has thus initiated “Interactive National Parks of Spain”, an application which enables access to information about national parks (history, flora, fauna, and other curiosities). However, 2D and 3D models show high-resolution virtual scenes recorded by drones (The Smart City Journal). Furthermore, the attractiveness of cultural routes is encompassed by virtual walks and attractions, conceived as virtual museums (PGZ County, n.d.).

An example is AR technology in museums, which enables visitors to be informed interactively (Ding, 2017). So, nowadays, many museums offer virtual exhibitions on their official websites. Theatre plays, concerts, and festivals also take place online, as well as virtual tours of certain sites. Many other adaptations to different situations in which specific restrictions and measures are imposed, limiting visits and physical contact due to the pandemic conditions. Robots and digital assistants and self-service

kiosks were soon used, which, although extremely useful, cannot replace interpersonal communication with guests who wish to have it.

Smart tourism is frequently misunderstood and linked expressly to technology, and all the aspects of such action are not considered. This is why it is necessary to provide a better definition of the smart concept and the greater involvement of government institutions in creating and implementing smart tourism projects (Gretzel et al., 2015). This smart destination concept primarily refers to cultural affirmation, sustainable development, inclusion and physical accessibility.

Through tourist boards and developed DMOs, tourism organisation directly impacts the placement of tourist information through promotional materials and the tourist information system.

Despite the absence of a unique definition, Donaldson and Preston (1995) state that the stakeholders are all those who have any interest in the organisation or its activities. March and Wilkinson (2009) stress the importance of stakeholder cooperation within tourism destinations; however, according to Adebayo and Butcher (2022). Community participation in these processes, including cultural and political structures, occurs in a wider context. On the other hand, Sautter and Leisen (1999) regard cooperation as essential as an expression of sustainability through two stakeholders' basic roles: development and planning (Bramwell & Lane, 2000), as well as cooperation and marketing activities (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Kujala et al. (2022) suggest that stakeholder inclusion refers to the goals, activities and effects of stakeholders' relationship on moral, strategic and/or pragmatic processes. Some authors stress the importance of DMOs as key stakeholders in the coordination, management and facilitation of the implementation of smart initiatives in tourism (Gretzel, 2022) and in the development and affiliation of different stakeholders in the destination (Sorokina et al., 2022).

Methodology

Selection of tourist attractions

The research design included the identification of a significant destination and the heritage site, including identifying and evaluating its decision-makers. That enabled the reliability of the data and the study. The Town of Poreč was chosen because of its attractive geographical position. It is situated in the predominant tourist region in Croatia – Istria, which produced 32.9% of the total number of overnights and 28.7% of the total number of arrivals in the Republic of Croatia in 2021 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Constant investment in tourism development results in numerous awards and acknowledgements, elevating the destination as one of the leaders of Croatian tourism for many years. Due to the considerable tourist traffic and protected UNESCO cultural heritage, the Town of Poreč was selected as a research site.

The criteria for selecting cultural heritage in this research are directed towards the availability of cultural heritage digital promotion, given that as many as 55.5% of tourists visiting Croatia use the Internet as the main source of information about the destination (Institut za turizam, 2019), the scope of material and non-material cultural heritage and the cultural attraction specificities.

Website analysis

For the research of digital promotion of the listed Poreč attractions, official Internet websites of the attractions themselves were chosen, i.e., attraction management websites and the County of Istria Tourist Board websites. These sites are usually the point

of the initial interaction between tourists and tourist attractions and contain conjoined information about the tourist offer, including information about cultural attractions.

It is important to create Internet websites that contain or express their purpose, history, products, and vision and which, at first sight, are attractive and sufficiently interesting to encourage repeat visits (Kotler et al., 2014); website elements were selected for evaluation of digital promotion of Poreč cultural attractions, taking into account the design elements of an efficient Internet website, according to Kotler et al. (2014) – context, content, community, customisation, communication, connection and commerce. According to the elements' coverage, the following website elements were selected: foreign languages, reviews/grades, photo gallery, virtual walk, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Newsletter, online booking and email contact form.

Data analysis includes the descriptive and comparative longitudinal statistical analysis of the three observed years, which implies the development of the smart tourism destination and its online promotion through differentiated website elements. The desk research was conducted in March 2018, 2020, and 2022, and the results represent a platform for new knowledge and provide answers to research questions.

Qualitative research

Furthermore, research on the perception of key decision-makers in tourism destinations was conducted who are, directly or indirectly, involved in cultural heritage management and promotion. They represent cultural institutions, regional and local tourist boards – DMOs and local government. For research anonymity, the personal communications are coded with a scale from A – E, as follows:

- Cultural attraction decision maker A and B (Personal communication A and B)
- Tourist destination decision maker C and D (Personal communication C and D)
- The policy decision maker (Personal communication E)

The research used semi-structured interviews between 15th November and 15th December 2022. The interview aimed to determine whether tourism destination decision-makers recognise the potential of smart technologies to affirm cultural heritage promotion. The method of discourse analysis was used for processing the qualitative research data, and statistical indicators encompass the results.

Results

Website analysis

Digital promotion involves using digital channels to promote products or services, attract potential customers, and build brand awareness. A business's website is often the primary channel for digital promotion because customers can learn about the business, view products or services, and make purchases or bookings. A crucial aspect of digital promotion is website elements, which are essential for building and maintaining a website.

Further, the digital promotions data evaluation is presented from the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board, selected tourism attractions from 2018, 2020 and 2022, and are longitudinally evaluated. Parallel, the data on digital promotion from the official Internet website of the selected tourist attractions is also evaluated for the same years. The evaluation elements are divided into 10 website tool categories: foreign languages, reviews/grades, photo gallery, virtual tour, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Newsletter, online booking and email contact form.

The existence of a specific element is numerically coded with 1 and non-existence with 0. Letters and numbers with changes concerning the previous years are marked in red. To avoid coding bias, authors use multiple persons to code the data and triangulation, i.e., verifying interpretations with other sources (on social media channels).

Table 1 presents website elements as part of digital promotion used by the official tourist body, in this case, the Istria Tourist Board.

Table 1

Evaluation of website elements as part of the digital promotion of the Town of Poreč tourist attractions from the Internet website of the Istria Tourist Board in 2018, 2020 and 2022

Website elements	Year	The Euphrasian Basilica	The Poreč Heritage Museum	The Zuccato Palace	Giostra	The Istrian Parliament
Foreign languages	2018	IT, DE, ENG, FR, RUS, NL	0	IT, DE, ENG, FR, RUS, NL	0	IT, DE, ENG, FR, RUS, NL
	2020	IT, ENG, DE	0	IT, ENG, DE	IT, ENG, DE	IT, ENG, DE
	2022	IT, ENG, DE	0	IT, ENG, DE	IT, ENG, DE	IT, ENG, DE
Reviews/grades	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Photo Gallery	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Virtual tour	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Facebook	2018	1	0	1	0	1
	2020	1	0	1	1	1
	2022	1	0	1	1	1
Instagram	2018	1	0	1	0	1
	2020	1	0	1	1	1
	2022	1	0	1	1	1
Twitter	2018	1	0	1	0	1
	2020	1	0	1	1	1
	2022	1	0	1	1	1
Pinterest	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Newsletter	2018	1	0	1	0	1
	2020	1	0	1	1	1
	2022	1	0	1	1	1
Online booking	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Email contact form	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Authors' work

From Table 1, it is evident that the tourist attraction of the Poreč Heritage Museum has not been evaluated, i.e., on the County of Istria Tourist Board Internet website, information is not available about the said attraction because the facility is closed due to the restoration of the Sinčić Palace where the Museum is housed. The designing of a new collection, exhibitions and social events take place only periodically. Therefore,

it will be exempt from further data analysis. Also, the information on the tourism attraction Giostra, in 2018, was not available on the stated Internet website.

Considering the availability of information on selected cultural attractions in foreign languages, it can be perceived from Table 1. that, on the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board, the number of foreign languages has been reduced in the last four years. In 2018, information on selected cultural attractions was available in six foreign languages, while in 2020 and 2022, three foreign languages were eliminated (French, Russian and Dutch), and only three languages (Italian, English and German) remained. The reason for this is a decrease in costs due to the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic, and the criteria for selection of available foreign languages in 2020 and 2022 were partly directed towards the largest number of arrivals and overnights according to the countries of origin (the choice of the German language). The choice of the Italian language was determined in line with the bilingualism of the Town of Poreč area. In contrast, the choice of the English language is essential, as it is a world language that dominates all communication forms.

Certain website elements – reviews, photo galleries, virtual walks, Pinterest, and online booking for the mentioned tourism attractions are not available on the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board. Implementing digital tools to increase the interest of more visitors to the tourism destination presents the additional possibility of promoting stated attractions.

On the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board, a possibility is available for sharing information on social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, for all the listed attractions (except for the Poreč Heritage Museum, for the above-cited reason and Giostra, which was listed as a tourist attraction on the stated Internet website after the year 2018). Also, the possibility of a newsletter is available for the listed attractions as a tool for providing information and direct communication with potential visitors.

Additionally, an analysis of website elements, as part of the digital promotion of the selected tourist attractions on the official Internet website of attractions, is provided, shown in Table 2.

When analysing the availability of foreign languages on the Internet websites of tourist attractions, it is evident that, throughout the observed years, the attraction Euphrasian Basilica has the highest number of foreign languages. It justifies that it is one of the most beautiful, preserved monuments of Early Byzantine art in the Mediterranean, included on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. Other tourist attractions have two to three foreign languages, apart from Zuccato Palace, which has no available foreign languages.

Website elements – reviews, Twitter, Pinterest, and online booking are not represented as possibilities on the Internet websites of the selected tourist attractions. A photo gallery is available on the Internet website of the listed attractions, apart from the Poreč Heritage Museum. In contrast, a virtual tour, as a modern marketing tool which enables the realistic experience of the space, regardless of the space and time, is not available for any tourist attraction.

While the social network Facebook is available on the Internet websites of all stated attractions in the last four years, the social network Instagram is available on the websites of two attractions – Poreč Heritage Museum and Zuccato Palace. The only tourist attraction in 2022 which has the possibility of a newsletter on the Internet websites is the Zuccato Palace. It is commendable that all Internet websites of the listed tourist attractions have email contact forms.

Comparing website elements as part of the digital promotion of selected tourist attractions - the website of the Istria Tourist Board and the official website of tourist

attractions, it is evident that the Internet website of the tourist attraction Euphrasian Basilica contains three foreign languages (Russian, French and Spanish) more than the County of Istria Tourist Board Internet website in the years 2020 and 2022. On its Internet website, the Zuccato Palace has no availability of foreign languages, and the Istrian Parliament has one foreign language on the County of Istria Tourist Board Internet website.

Table 2

Evaluation of website elements as part of the digital promotion of the Town of Poreč Tourism Attractions from the Official Internet Website of Tourism Attractions in 2018, 2020 and 2022

Website elements	Year	The Euphrasian Basilica	The Poreč Heritage Museum	The Zuccato Palace	Giostra	The Istrian Parliament
Foreign languages	2018	ENG, IT, DE, RUS, FR, ESP	ENG, IT	0	ENG, IT, DE	ENG, IT
	2020	ENG, IT, DE, RUS, FR, ESP	ENG, IT	0	ENG, IT, DE	ENG, IT
	2022	ENG, IT, DE, RUS, FR, ESP	ENG, IT	0	ENG, IT, DE	ENG, IT
Reviews/grades	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Photo Gallery	2018	1	0	1	1	1
	2020	1	0	1	1	1
	2022	1	0	1	1	1
Virtual tour	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Facebook	2018	0	1	1	1	1
	2020	1	1	1	1	1
	2022	1	1	1	1	1
Instagram	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	1	1	0	0
	2022	0	1	1	0	0
Twitter	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Pinterest	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Newsletter	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	1	0	0
Online booking	2018	0	0	0	0	0
	2020	0	0	0	0	0
	2022	0	0	0	0	0
Email contact form	2018	1	1	1	1	1
	2020	1	1	1	1	1
	2022	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Authors

The advantage of the tourist attractions Internet websites over the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board is evident in the tool photo gallery, as all the selected tourist attractions (apart from the Poreč Heritage Museum) have a photo gallery on their Internet websites as an essential element of drawing attention and awakening interest in a potential visitor.

Apart from the advantages of the tourist attractions Internet websites, an advantage can also be perceived in the email contact form tool. It facilitates direct contact and two-way communication with potential visitors for all the listed attractions concerning the Internet website of the County of Istria Tourist Board.

The deficiencies of the Internet websites of the listed attractions concerning the Internet websites of the official tourism portal of the County are evident from the availability of the social networks (especially Instagram and Twitter) and the newsletter. It is present only on the Internet websites of the attraction Zuccato Palace in 2022. With the development of new technological trends and accelerated expansion of mass use of applications, changes occur in consumers' behaviour and the use of more recent social networks. It is, therefore, necessary to follow the world's trends in technology and tourism and to adapt one's offer to the tourists' requirements to achieve a more efficient promotion and attract more tourists.

Reviews, virtual tours, Pinterest and online booking represent website elements that are not present on either of the two observed Internet websites and represent a potential for further development and improvement.

Digital promotion of cultural attractions can be a powerful tool for increasing awareness and attracting visitors through developing a strong online presence. This needs to include creating a website for cultural attractions that provides visitors with a virtual tour of the space, detailed information about exhibits, online booking and practical details like opening hours and ticket prices. Moreover, creating social media accounts to share engaging content and interact with potential visitors represents the potential that must be listed on the website and vice versa.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research was conducted based on the quantitative research data and determination of the potential for further development of cultural heritage digital promotion through website elements. The purpose is to determine the opinions and attitudes of tourist destinations and cultural attraction decision-makers about the possibilities of digital promotion through communication channels, online marketing tools and smart technologies. The research was carried out during November 2022, i.e., outside of the main tourism season, for greater dedication to surveying decision-makers and obtaining higher-quality responses. The decision-makers were contacted by email, and almost all the approached decision-makers agreed to participate in the research. The decision maker who did not respond to the invitation represents the Euphrasian Basilica, a cultural attraction included in the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. He never participates in research as he is a church clergy member.

Semi-structured interviews were distributed to cultural attraction decision-makers, tourist destination decision-makers and policy decision-makers. The data stated in this research, which concerns one cultural attraction, is incomplete due to the current reconstruction investment.

Initially, the interview contained questions about the current cultural heritage promotion situation. After that, the questions were directed towards digital promotion, the concept of smart technologies, their use and, at the very end, plans for implementing cultural heritage digital promotion (in the sense of qualitative research) and their importance (in the sense of quantitative research). The average duration of the interview was 30 minutes.

When analysing the question: "Does your organisation have a promotional strategy?" three decision-makers, A, C and D, replied positively, while two replied negatively, noting that one of the decision-makers, B, plans to introduce it. Given that promotional strategy aims to increase the interest in a specific product, i.e. cultural

attraction and attraction of a larger number of visitors, its importance is unquestionable, especially in today's digital trends.

All decision-makers, apart from policy decision maker E, promote cultural attractions by directing themselves towards the current promotion of cultural attractions. They are cooperating between themselves but also with other partners such as the diocese, event organisers and surrounding tourist boards. Mutual decision-maker performance certainly contributes to a more efficient cultural heritage model.

The following question was open-ended, and the decision-makers were asked to state their channels of communicating information. The results are presented in Table 3., a ranking scale of the frequency of key cultural attraction decision-makers use of communication channels.

The results indicated that they communicate information most frequently through social networks, then by website portal postings and newsletters. As a communication channel, at the same time, the decision-makers generally stated the term media, considering the wide context of information distribution. Certain decision-makers also use printed materials, i.e., newsletters, to communicate with potential visitors.

Table 3
Key Cultural Attraction Decision Makers' Communication Channels

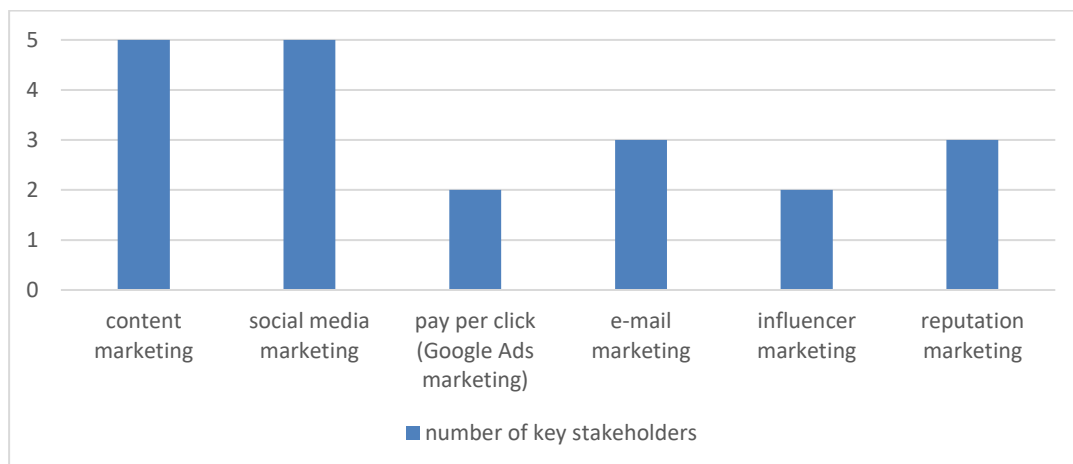
Rank of usage	Communication channels
1	Web portals
2	Newsletters
3	Social networks
4	Press release
5	Media
6	Public newsletter

Note: 1-the most frequent, 6-the least frequent

Source: Authors' work

The decision-makers were asked what online marketing tools they use from the possible options: content marketing, social media marketing, and pay-per-click (Google Ads marketing). Email marketing, influencer marketing and reputation marketing.

Figure 1
The Use of Online Marketing Tools by Decision Makers in Tourism Destination



Source: Authors' research

According to the data shown in Figure 1, it can be noted that all the surveyed decision-makers use content and social media marketing as essential strategies in today's online marketing. Tourist destination decision-makers C and D take the lead in the use of online marketing tools in comparison with other heritage offer decision-makers. They are the only ones who use all the offered online marketing tools, including influencer marketing, which is increasingly gaining importance in recent years. They are finding influential people who match the values of tourism destinations. They echo well with target customers; the stated marketing strategy has proved extremely efficient in attracting visitors to tourist destinations.

At the same time, cultural attraction decision maker A uses email marketing and reputation marketing and is adapting to the digital requirements of today's trends.

Concerning the considerable pressure of today's tourism, accompanied by an increase in visitors and a potential threat to the sustainability of cultural attractions and tourism destinations, the digital visitor management system was discussed with the decision-makers. Although statistical data is monitored by tourist destination decision-makers using the digital tourist registration system, they are used to determine the set plans' realisation. They are increasing yearly and are not adjusted with efficient visitor management, i.e., tourism destination sustainability. Cultural attraction decision maker A has implemented a digital visitor management system, i.e., an online booking system, which is used for paying for events and for those free of charge for planning an optimal number of visitors and cultural attraction sustainability.

As today's smart technologies are perceived as an inevitable trend in the competitive market, while implementing innovative and dynamic changes in the tourism destination cultural offer, the decision makers were asked what smart technologies they were using to promote cultural attractions, i.e., destination cultural heritage. Given that it was an open-ended question without listing any options, all the surveyed decision-makers stated they were not using any smart technologies. However, cultural attraction decision maker A stated that they intended to introduce QR codes which would promote cultural heritage. In contrast, after setting up the permanent display, cultural attraction decision maker B plans to implement a marketing campaign based on smart technologies, which it had not defined.

Its implementation plans were initiated after establishing its position in cultural heritage digital promotion. They stated possibilities, and the decision-makers, apart from modestly presented plans in the previous question, listed numerous other smart technology possibilities. This shows that the decision-makers are not sufficiently acquainted with smart technologies within the context of cultural heritage digital promotion. After listing possible smart technologies, cultural attraction decision maker B presented the most comprehensive plans to introduce virtual and augmented reality (VR, AR). 3D mapping, digital ticketing, digital souvenirs and postcards, QR codes, audio guide and mobile application. Cultural attraction decision maker A states the plans for introducing digital assistants, digital ticketing and QR codes. The decision-makers who do not directly manage cultural attractions, i.e. those who are focused on tourism destination management as a whole, do not plan to implement digital tools, apart from the tourist destination decision maker D, which stated that even though it does not directly manage cultural attractions, they plan to introduce digital souvenirs and postcards, QR codes, audio guide and mobile applications, aiming to stimulate visitors' interest in the destination's culture.

Regarding the plans for implementing smart technologies in the cultural attraction promotion, the decision makers were asked about the challenges to which smart technologies have not already been implemented in the business. Their biggest challenge is the lack of financial means and workforce.

For the determination of decision makers' attitudes and opinions about cultural heritage promotion and the impact of digital promotion on the realisation of a considerable number of visits, sustainable management and destination competitive advantage, the decision makers were given statements and possibilities to answer the following Likert scale of 1, which included "I do not agree at all.", up to 5 "I completely agree." The results of decision makers' attitudes and opinions are shown in Table 4 and the descriptive statistical analysis results.

Table 4

Destination Decision Makers' Attitudes and Opinions About Cultural Heritage Promotion

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.
The current promotion of the destination cultural heritage/destination attractions you manage is not sufficiently developed.	2.20	0.837
By additional investment in the destination's digital promotion of cultural heritage/cultural attractions, many visits would be realised.	3.60	1.673
Cultural heritage digital promotion could substantially impact the sustainable management of the destination cultural heritage/cultural attractions I manage.	4.40	0.894
The destination's competitive advantage can be achieved by digital cultural heritage promotion.	4.60	0.894

Source: Authors' research

It is evident from Table 4. that the largest average grade (4.60) was awarded to the statement, "The destination competitive advantage can be achieved by cultural heritage digital promotion", which points to the fact that the decision-makers are aware of the importance of cultural heritage digital promotion. However, regardless of the importance of cultural heritage digital promotion, the decision makers believe that the current promotion of destination cultural heritage, i.e. cultural attraction they manage, is not sufficiently developed, and this statement was given the average grade of 2.20.

The decision-makers gave a high average grade of 4.40 to the statement, "Cultural heritage digital promotion could substantially impact sustainable management of the destination cultural heritage/cultural attractions I manage", which points to the fact that they are aware of the impact digital promotion has on cultural heritage sustainable management.

Discussion

In consideration of positive shifts in the period from 2018 to 2022, a discussion is developed about the dynamics of the implementation of technological tools. The longitudinal research points to digital promotion with a special reference to the COVID-19 pandemic period, where the destination decision-makers and attraction managers had the time for consideration and a reset. Namely, due to a lull in tourist traffic, the attraction management recognised the advantages of digitalisation, that is, the necessary need for communication with potential visitors, which remains present in the minds of consumers through social networks and affirms competitiveness for the post-pandemic period.

Given the importance of continuous communication with potential visitors, Internet websites must serve as a tool for promoting tourist attractions and as the main information and communication channel. The pandemic period served to reflect on

improving them, and, in recent years, certain website elements were included on the stated Internet websites, such as social networks and newsletters, which enable interactive communication with potential visitors.

It is presumed that, in the choice of tourist destination and tourist attractions, visitors primarily inform themselves on the main tourism Internet website, by which they expect to receive useful information. It is, therefore, very important that the Internet website is simple and well-structured and contains multimedia content, i.e., it encompasses website elements that will intrigue potential visitors and encourage them to move into action. By analysing the selected Internet websites, it is evident that they have improved concerning the pre-pandemic period; however, there is still substantial potential for the development of certain website elements, such as virtual tours, reviews, and online booking which, by being implemented, would contribute to the quality of the website itself. Further to this, considering the year 2022, a tendency is recognised towards the realisation of new competitiveness through the monitoring of modern trends, the realisation of tourist visits and comprehensive excellence, which is aimed at increasing the integrated quality of the destinations as smart destinations of the future.

Website elements represent an important potential for promoting cultural attractions. Certain website elements can help attract attention and arouse interest among potential visitors. The research determined that the observed websites as key promoters of cultural attractions in destinations do not use all the observed website elements to promote cultural attractions. Although most websites use a photo gallery, some use email contact forms, different foreign languages, social networks (limited), and newsletters, and the possibilities are visible in the introduction of other website elements such as reviews, virtual tours, online booking and expansion to other social networks, which answers Q1.

Although there are visible advances in the implementation of digital promotion of cultural attractions during and after the pandemic period in six years period, there is certainly significant potential for further development and introduction of new tools for websites to increase the interest of potential visitors, following new trends, technology development and promotional opportunities. For example, the potential for development is certainly manifested in the introduction of virtual tours, which today represent an essential web tool that enables potential visitors to have a virtual perception of cultural attractions, i.e., a view from another perspective, representing the answer to Q2. The absence of certain website elements that are outputs of new trends in digital technology can represent a missed opportunity for further promotion and improvement of the website. Digital promotion of cultural attractions does not fully follow the development of technology, promotional tools and possibilities. Namely, in today's dynamic world, the development of technology, promotional tools and other digital possibilities occurs very fast. Thus, the lagging behind digital promotion of tourist attractions is not surprising. It arises from the research that the reaction to the challenges in developing the digital promotion of tourist attractions should be more energetic, as it does not keep pace with the promotional tools and the possibilities of technological benefits. Technology development and promotional tools provide cultural attractions with newer, simpler and more efficient possibilities for reaching the target groups concerning previous promotion types. Therefore, destination decision makers need to have mutual strategic marketing performance and constantly follow the trends of technology development, i.e., promotional tools, to get to know the ways of its promotion in a newer, technologically advanced manner and, in this way, assume the leading role in the competitive market.

Most decision-makers recognise the importance of digital promotion, online marketing tools and smart technology in promoting cultural attractions. Although they promote cultural attractions through social networks, web portals and newsletters, only certain decision-makers have a promotional strategy. This basic document directs the promotion and attracts specific target groups. When considering online marketing tools, decision-makers recognise their importance, and some use them in their businesses, with tourist destination decision-makers leading the way in using them. The concept of smart technologies is not a well-known concept among decision-makers. However, there are plans for their implementation. Based on these considerations, the answer to Q3 can be given as decision-makers recognise the importance of digital promotion, online marketing tools and smart technology in promoting cultural attractions. However, they do not sufficiently exploit their potential.

Although the awareness of the importance of digital promotion of cultural attractions seems to be present among decision-makers and institutions, there still seems to be a lack of knowledge and skills necessary to apply these strategies successfully. Investment in education and the development of digital skills is needed to increase the quality of digital promotion of cultural attractions and their visibility on a global level. In addition, it is necessary to provide adequate financial resources to enable the use of the latest technologies in promoting cultural attractions, which could attract a larger number of visitors and increase the economic value of cultural attractions.

Conclusion

A powerful development of technological achievements, especially during the pandemic, has created new possibilities for promoting heritage tourism, enabling future “buyers” to view it from another perspective. The progress of technology and new possibilities of presentation and virtual reality have brought new, revolutionary, and interactive presentation methods.

Modern society is defined by information technologies used daily by modern tourists. Mobile technologies, applications, social networks and different Internet platforms facilitate interactivity, continuity, fast information transfer, information dissemination, trading and flexibility in tourism. To adapt to modern tourists influenced by new technologies, adopting new ways of thinking and perceptions of tourism and culture, website elements, as possibilities for digital promotion of cultural attractions, have been evaluated in the paper.

The study results generate practical and scientific implications in the smart destination context.

The paper provides practical insights for tourism destination decision-makers, cultural institutions, and regional and local tourist boards by identifying effective website elements for promoting cultural attractions and providing guidance on creating an efficient Internet website according to the design elements proposed by Cyr (2014) and Wang (2022).

The paper's longitudinal data analysis helps tourism destination decision-makers track the effectiveness of their online promotion efforts and adjust their strategies accordingly. The paper provides practical insights into leveraging smart technologies to promote cultural heritage. It may be useful for tourism destination decision-makers and cultural institutions looking to enhance their online presence and promotion efforts. In this sense, the importance of education in e-marketing for improving customer experience is emphasised, and it complements the research of Kim et al. (2012). On the other hand, benchmarking for implementing good practices and competitiveness measurement is detected as another strong marketing tool.

In periods of extraordinary situations, in particular, in which human factors cannot affect or may affect in a small measure, the importance of unhindered interactive communication with virtual “buyers” is evident, which, with the development of digital promotion, can help the destination in individual approach and satisfaction of potential visitors. The recommendation for destination stakeholders' collaboration produced by this research and leaned on the study of Gretzel (2022) and Kujala et al. (2022) are related to the improvement of digital promotion of tourist attractions and cultural heritage and are directed towards all stakeholders in a destination. With a joint approach, the decision-makers, managers of cultural attractions and cultural heritage, DMOs, and all destination stakeholders consider implementing digital e-tools to present their offer “to the world” in a contemporary, digital manner. The content must be interesting and simple, provoking a “genuine” perception of tourism and cultural heritage. By considering potential website elements, they will be acquainted with modern models of digital promotion possibilities of their implementation and thus access a larger number of potential visitors.

The paper contributes to the academic literature on the digital promotion of cultural attractions by evaluating the effectiveness of various website elements elaborated by Neuhofer et al. (2019) and Ding (2017)

The paper provides a longitudinal analysis of data from three observed years, which helps track the development of the destination's online promotion through differentiated website elements.

The paper contributes to the academic literature by exploring the potential of smart technologies for promoting cultural heritage and determining whether tourism destination decision-makers recognise the potential of smart technologies to affirm cultural heritage promotion.

The paper utilises a discourse analysis method for processing qualitative research data, which may interest researchers in tourism studies.

This paper's research results represent a scientific contribution to the field of social sciences, marketing, and tourism field, which is manifested in the interactive approach of smart technologies and cultural attractions as a potential for the development of “smart” destinations that complement theoretical aspects of European Commission (2020) and Boes et al. (2015). Considering the topics that will contribute to new knowledge, the need is presented to research promotion on social networks, given that an evident shift is stressed in the affirmation of that online promotion tool. Therefore, the theoretical platform was developed by Buhalis and Law (2008) and Hudson et al. (2016). Future research should also include tourists as stakeholders of the tourist demand. The research limitations are reflected in the sample choice and its specific features as one of the most visited destinations in Croatia.

The topics challenging the factors of influence on visits, perception of attractiveness and implementation of innovations where they, by themselves, carry certain levels of attractiveness, represent a platform for the development of smart destinations which, besides technology and social and cultural sustainability, also affirm inclusion and accessibility for sensitive groups.

The research contributes to the affirmation of the possibility of developing digital promotion of tourism destination cultural heritage, considering its specificities. It presents a unique study that equally points to the importance of implementing smart technologies by the tourism destination key managing stakeholders and their mutual strategic marketing performance.

Acknowledgements

This paper is an extension of the paper "Affirmation of cultural heritage digital promotion within smart destination concept", presented at the ENTRENOVA – Enterprise Research Innovation Conference 2022 and published in the conference proceedings: Floričič, T., Šker, I., & Maras Benassi, H. (2022). Affirmation of Cultural Heritage Digital Promotion within Smart Destination Concept. ENTRENOVA - ENTERprise REsearch INNOVation, 8(1), 154–168. <https://doi.org/10.54820/entrenova-2022-0015>

This paper results from the scientific project "Tourism crises - stakeholders' roles and recovery strategies" supported by the Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković", Juraj Dobrila University of Pula. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr Mijo Mirković" Pula. The publishing of this paper is financially supported by Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Project "Tourism crises - stakeholders' roles and recovery strategies" and by the authors personally. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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About the authors

Tamara Floričić, PhD, is an associate professor of Tourism at Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Croatia, Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr. Mijo Mirković". She lectures in courses related to tourism and the hospitality industry. She is an author of many research papers with citations, published in prestigious publications focused on hospitality specialisation, innovations in organisation and marketing in the hospitality business, which she also explores in co-authorship books. Her published book *Contemporary Hotel Industry – The Challenge of New Competitiveness* explores many industry-related topics and innovations that shape new trends. She is an active reviewer and member of the scientific journal program and editorial boards. Her scientific expertise in the field of the Hospitality industry, combined with more than 15 years of a business career as a marketing manager in an international AHG hotel company, affirms her interest and competencies of research and understanding related to hotel companies. Tamara Floričić is the project manager for EU Interreg projects at the university. Project Atlas was concluded in 2019, and ongoing AdriPromTour and research in two scientific university projects. She is the president of the non-profit association ArtRencontre. The author can be contacted at email: ffloricic@unipu.hr

Irena Šker is a PhD student at the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Opatija. She received an MSc Specialisation in Organisation and Management at the Faculty of Economics in Osijek (Croatia) with a master's thesis named "Management Style Research in Agrokor Company ". Her main research interest, as the main concept in her PhD thesis, is sensory marketing in a tourism destination. Moreover, her wider scientific interests are related to innovations in tourism, marketing and entrepreneurship, as she was the project coordinator at the Entrepreneurial Incubator Poreč. She authored several scientific papers, mainly in tourism (experience, development, innovation). The author is a project manager of several projects funded by national and EU funds, with experience in applying and implementing project proposals. She is also an external associate at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism in Pula in Customer Behaviour, Sustainable Marketing, Non-Profit Marketing, Sales Management, Internal Marketing and Services Marketing. The author can be contacted at email: irena.sker@unipu.hr

Hermína Maras Benassi is a PhD student at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Portorož (Slovenia). She obtained bachelor's and master's degrees in Culture and Tourism from the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula (Croatia). Hermína is interested in cultural heritage, sustainable development, quality and innovations in tourism. She is a member of the editorial board of the proceedings *The Mass Media Through Students' Eyes: Undergraduate University Study Culture and Tourism Students' Proceedings*. Hermína Maras Benassi won the Rector's Award of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula and the Dean's Award of the Faculty of Interdisciplinary, Italian and Cultural Studies in 2017/2018 and 2019/2020. She participated in the organisation of the *Borders and Crossings Conference* held in 2018 on the Brijuni Islands (Pula) and the *MEKST Conference* in Novi Sad (Serbia) as a volunteer. She is a co-author of several scientific papers. The author can be contacted at email: hermina.maras@yahoo.com