



Benchmarking CVB website performance: Spatial and structural patterns

Svetlana Stepchenkova^{a,*}, Liang Tang^b, SooCheong (Shawn) Jang^{c,1}, Andrei P. Kirilenko^{d,2}, Alastair M. Morrison^{e,3}

^a Department of Tourism, Recreation, and Sport Management, College of Health and Human Performance, University of Florida, PO Box 118208, Gainesville, FL 32611-8208, USA

^b Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Consumer and Family Sciences, Purdue University, Stone Hall, Room 154, 700 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059, USA

^c Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Consumer and Family Sciences, Purdue University, Stone Hall, Room B1-C, 700 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059, USA

^d Department of Earth System Science and Policy, University of North Dakota, Clifford Hall, Room 328, 4149 University Avenue Stop 9011, Grand Forks, ND 58202-9011, USA

^e Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, College of Consumer and Family Sciences, Purdue University, Stone Hall, Room 111A, 700 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 February 2008

Accepted 22 June 2009

Keywords:

GIS
Balanced Scorecard (BSC)
Benchmarking
Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs)
Destination marketing
Spatial analysis
Website performance

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated 967 U.S. CVB websites using a modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) approach which assesses website performance with respect to overall technical functionality, customer friendliness and usability, effectiveness of marketing the destination, and information content. Spatial maps were constructed for these four dimensions and overall CVB website performance using ArcMap v.9.2 GIS software. A structural pattern of CVB website performance was obtained using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). It was concluded that CVB websites primarily need improvement in marketing the destination product. The analysis revealed significant differences in website performance between members and non-members of Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) as well as regional differences. Study implications for destination marketing organizations and CVB website designers are discussed.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Marketing cities and other locations as tourist destinations has been one of the major trends in the U.S. tourism in the past three decades. Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) have acted as destination marketing organizations and have been responsible for attracting pleasure visitors and meeting groups to their respective locations (Yuan, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2003). Most CVBs operate as independent, not-for-profit organizations, and their organizational structures vary depending on the character of the destination, i.e., a single city, a metropolitan area, a county, or regional destination comprised of several counties (Gartrell, 1988). CVBs provide opportunities for local businesses to promote their products in communications with their travel markets and, at the same time,

help tourists and potential visitors to form expectations, create destination images, and assist in purchasing tourism products (Buhalis, 2003; Pike, 2004; Shanshan, Buhalis, & Law, 2007). CVBs enhance the economic growth and development of their respective regions, making them a desirable location for meetings, conventions, and tours, and increase the environmental well-being of destinations through promotion and comprehensive marketing. Thus, CVBs play several important roles at once: an economic driver creating new income, employment, and a more diversified local economy; a community marketer communicating the most appropriate destination image and positioning destination appropriately in the marketplace; and an industry coordinator encouraging less industry fragmentation (Morrison, Bruen, & Anderson, 1998; Prezenza, Sheehan, & Ritchie, 2005; Wang, 2008).

With the development of tourism offers and services, there is an intensive competition for visitors between destinations, and an appealing presentation of a destination to potential markets is a crucial success factor. As part of their marketing strategy, CVBs widely use Internet technology, especially destination websites, as this approach offers new distribution channels for destination product, reaches people in faraway locations, and provides richer information and less expensive means of communication. It also

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 352 392 4042; fax: +1 352 392 7588.

E-mail addresses: svetlana.step@ufl.edu (S. Stepchenkova), tang6@purdue.edu (L. Tang), jang12@purdue.edu (SooCheong (Shawn) Jang), andrei.kirilenko@und.edu (A.P. Kirilenko), alastair@purdue.edu (A.M. Morrison).

¹ Tel.: +1 765 496 3610; fax: +1 765 494 0327.

² Tel.: +1 701 777 6761; fax: +1 701 777 2940.

³ Tel.: +1 765 494 7905; fax: +1 765 496 1168.

allows establishing and developing new relationships with members and other cooperative partners. Therefore, regular evaluations of CVB website performance are needed to effectively facilitate continuous improvements, i.e., customer retention and return on investment, and judge site performance against competitors and industry peers (Fesenmaier, Leppers, & O'Leary, 1999; Tierney, 2000). Xiang, Kothari, Hu, and Fesenmaier (2007) argue that benchmarking performance of the destination marketing organizations websites should be considered as a regular and continuous instrument that contributes to development of CVBs' winning management strategies. However, the multi-dimensional nature of website performance, the variety of approaches to performance evaluations, and the time consuming evaluation process often prevent regular and comprehensive monitoring of CVB website performance.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to evaluate performance of all U.S. CVB websites using a standardized measure, a modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) approach, thus getting a picture of CVB website performance across the whole country. Such a comprehensive survey allowed aggregated comparisons of CVB websites by different variables, such as Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) membership, state, or geographic location (using the Geographical Information System ESRI ArcMap GIS), thus casting light on the leadership within the competition. In addition, the motivation for the study was to understand how different CVBs approach the website design task and to what website features they pay most attention, i.e., obtaining the current model of CVB website design. Such information was thought to be helpful in understanding whether CVBs in practice follow academic research recommendations and marketing theory. The data collection was conducted in 2006 as a benchmarking project for the Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) program of the DMAI. The contribution of this study is in completeness of the evaluation data, which can be considered as nearly a census of U.S. CVB websites, as well as in applying spatial statistics and spatial maps to visualize the wealth of evaluation data and compare performance on a large scale. Practical relevance of the study was attested by participants of CDME training program over the past 10 years.

2. Study background

Benchmarking is as a continuous systematic process for evaluation of organizational performance in order to assist in developing organizational strategies (Spendolini, 1992; Xiang et al., 2007; Yasin, 2002). Benchmarking allows improvement of business practices by building upon "performance comparison, gap identification, and change management process" (Kozak, 2002: p. 499, referring to Watson, 1993). Scholars distinguish external and internal benchmarking; the former refers to comparisons against other organizations in the industry, while the latter is concerned with organizational units comparing against other units within the same organization (Watson, 1993), or against itself over time (Bogan & English, 1994). In the benchmarking literature, the classification of benchmarking by its objective into (1) process benchmarking; (2) performance benchmarking; and (3) strategic benchmarking was first proposed by Bogan and English (1994). Process benchmarking evaluates work processes (e.g., recruitment process) in order to establish the most effective business practices. Performance benchmarking focuses on the company's competitive position by assessing such product/service elements as price, quality, reliability, and other performance characteristics. Finally, strategic benchmarking is looking for successful strategies which would allow the company to obtain a winning position in the marketplace. Past research has highlighted the value of benchmarking in

aiding firms and organizations in assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, identifying best practices, and setting realistic goals in their strategic planning (Evans & Lindsay, 1993).

To improve the effectiveness of a tourism website as a destination marketing tool, evaluation of website performance has been a growing concern among tourism scholars since late 1990s. According to Li and Petrick (2007), there are two major trends in tourism website evaluation studies; the same trends were noted in non-tourism fields, e.g., management information systems or Internet marketing and electronic commerce literature, by Aladwani (2006). One line of research concentrated on the design, content, effectiveness, and other quality issues that make websites more attractive to visitors and facilitate stickiness and retention (e.g., Cai, Card, & Cole, 2004; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2007; O'Connor, 2004). The other stream of website studies paid more attention to how visitors interact with websites and examined such quality aspects as consumer purchase decisions (e.g., Liang & Lai, 2002), website reuse (e.g., Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2002), and willingness to e-shop (e.g., Heijden & Verhagen, 2002). Studies from the second group relied heavily on the adaptation of the SERVQUAL instrument by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) to assess website quality; however, tourism-related websites are rarely the focus of evaluation (Park, Gretzel, & Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). In the most recent qualitative meta-analysis of success factors for destination marketing websites, Park and Gretzel (2007) surveyed 153 academic articles which dealt with the assessment of website quality, the term that they chose to refer to the construct which was studied in those articles under a variety of names: usability, e-satisfaction, e-service quality, website performance, e-loyalty, etc. These authors identified 38 dimensions along which website quality was evaluated, and further extracted nine key factors critical for both tourism and non-tourism website success, as viewed by most scholars. They labeled these factors as information quality, ease of use, security/privacy, responsiveness, interactivity, visual appearance, personalization, trust, and fulfillment. Their research highlighted the fact that the website quality construct still lacks a conceptual definition, which hinders large-scale benchmarking of tourism websites, notwithstanding its practical importance.

A variety of approaches were explored by researchers aiming at analyzing website features and designing evaluation benchmarks. However, in a survey of practice, Morrison, Taylor, and Douglas (2004) concluded that the evaluation of website performance in tourism and hospitality literature lacked a unified standard, a finding consistent with the situation in a broader marketing field (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003). Perhaps one of the best known uniform instruments for tourism and hospitality website evaluation is the modified Balanced Scorecard (mBSC) by Morrison, Taylor, Morrison, and Morrison (1999), which was roughly modeled around Kaplan and Norton's (1992) Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach accepted in management science. BSC could be defined as a series of selected measures stemming from the organization's vision and strategy. The BSC measures company performance from four perspectives: customer, financial, learning and growth, and internal business processes. The four perspectives are balanced to achieve organizational goals. Since its creation, there have been numerous adaptations of the BSC approach to compare organizational performance in various industry sectors (Sterne, 2002). The mBSC is to satisfy the evaluation needs of tourism and hospitality websites by emphasizing such perspectives of website performance comparison as technical functionality, customer friendliness and usability, marketing effectiveness, and the level of information presented. In 2002, Mills, Morrison, and Ismail (2002) further edited the mBSC by adding more aspects of comparison in each of the four

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات