Research Paper

Designing and implementing digital visitor experiences in New York State: The case of the Finger Lakes Interactive Play (FLIP) project

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides insight into the challenges of implementing digital experiences through a marketing development project intended to generate interest and awareness in historic visitor attractions located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. I Love New York Empire State Development's initiative sponsored this marketing development project (FLIP) to promote historic visitor attractions in New York State. A case study is used to examine the interaction of stakeholders between destination marketing organizations and visitor attractions in implementing digital marketing strategies through the New York Path Through History initiative. The findings of this case provide understanding of the challenges related to organizational architecture and capacity in the development and implementation of an interactive visitor app to generate a digital experience for 12 historic visitor attractions located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. This case provides an opportunity to highlight the complexities of implementing digital marketing efforts of a regional destination through a diverse set of stakeholders. The findings of this case study are useful in understanding the organizational, human and technological requirements for implementing digital marketing strategies involving mobile technologies and augmented reality experiences. Stakeholders may consider investing equal effort in assessing both their organizational ability for effective participation in destination marketing projects and technological capacity for implementing digital experiences as they do in securing financial support for digital marketing endeavors.

1. Introduction

Digital technology plays an important role to sustain the competitive advantage in the new digital world of destination marketing. The use of these digital technologies (for example Internet, mobile devices and global positioning systems), has become a central issue for tourism suppliers, intermediaries, destinations and tourists (Benckendorff, Sheldon, & Fesenmaier, 2014). Recently, even the most remote destinations have shown an increased interest in tourism development employing collaborative and digital marketing strategies (Morrison, 2013). As a fundamental element of the tourism system, visitor attractions are also in the process of adopting digital technologies. Relevant to this case study, digital technologies are fast becoming a key instrument in marketing of visitor attractions (Din & Hecht, 2007). The literature demonstrates the role of organizing, cooperation and complementarities in the successful implementation of digital technologies for visitor attractions (Camisón et al., 2016; Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernández, 2016).

Digital technology is an important component in the tourism system and plays a key role in dissemination of information in the tourism industry. Providing static and dynamic information, digital technology has four main functions (inspiration, transaction, experience and reflection) in the visitors’ experience journey (Benckendorff et al., 2014). These functions help in attracting visitors to attractions, staging on-site experiences and managing visitors at attractions. Website integration, mobile devices, social media networks and augmented reality experiences are among the forms of digital technology utilized by destinations and attractions. Integrating technologies such as mobile devices, augmented reality and websites, digital technologies facilitate the provision of dynamic information. Dynamic information is much more user friendly and interactive than the static information provided by conventional marketing methods such as brochures and websites (Guttentag, 2010). One of the most significant current discussions in the field is developing the ongoing cycle of the visitor experience with historical visitor attractions (Ruíz, Wecker, Lanir, & Stock, 2014). This means extending and linking the on-site visitor experience provision to the pre- and post-visit phases through use of digital technology. As such, using gamifying and augmenting applications, the FLIP project’s...
intent was to provide dynamic and sensory information to engage visitors with historical visitor attractions before and during their visits.

Utilization of technology in general, and information technology in particular, are major areas of interest for practitioners and researchers (Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011). Extensive literature focuses on the call for, and need of, digital destination marketing efforts and their benefits (Buhalis et al., 2011; Werthner et al., 2015). However, there has been little discussion about the development and implementation of digital marketing experiences through regional collaborations at the destination level. Much uncertainty still exists about the management of supply side issues in tourism. The FLIP project provided an important case opportunity to advance the understanding of challenges and requirements for the digitalization of destinations and/or visitor attractions in the supply side.

By drawing on the multi-stakeholder involvement management framework (Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013) and sources on resource-based analysis of destination management (Camisón et al., 2016), this paper examines stakeholder’s resource and capability base for effective participation in digital marketing efforts at the regional level. The objectives are twofold, to examine the outcomes of undefined organizational roles, and unclear prerequisite capabilities and resource base, and make recommendations for implementing diverse public-private driven destination marketing efforts. This paper illustrates the importance of stakeholder capabilities and management in the successful implementation of digital destination marketing projects. The study is useful to managers and policy makers who make decisions in our field of destination management and marketing.

2. Literature review

2.1. Digitalization and destination stakeholders

The terms digital destination and e-tourism can be used interchangeably to refer to the process of production and marketing of tourist experiences through the use of information, telecommunication, media and entertainment technologies in tourism destinations (Benckendorff et al., 2014). E-tourism is defined as the digitization of the tourist experience and the tourism industry (Buhalis, 2011). Applications of digital technologies in tourism are changing the art and science of tourism management (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Digital technologies have a strong impact on marketing all tourism products, and the last decade has seen effective utilization of digital technologies in production activities as well (Whitelaw, 2008). The terms, such as information and communication technology applications, smart destinations, internet marketing, social media marketing and mobile marketing describe various components of digital technologies and often related to the specific functions, such as production, distribution and delivery of tourism products, services and experiences. Recent evidence suggests that tourism organizations consider technology as a fundamental property of production and consumption of destination experiences (Benckendorff et al., 2014; Werthner et al., 2015) demonstrating an increasing interest in technology related resources, knowledge and capabilities.

2.2. Resources, knowledge and capabilities

Resources, knowledge and capabilities have been identified as meaningful possession and/or components to maintain long term competitive advantage for organizations. For example, Ritchie and Crouch (2011) describes major components of tourism supply policy, those being physical, human, financial, information and program/activity resources. Drawing on the resource-based view (RBV) and pertinent tourism research, Camisón et al. (2016) advocate distinctive categories of resources and capabilities at two levels (the destination effect and attractions effect). They investigate the role of tangible and intangible assets on one’s competitive position in relation to attractions (firm effect) and the destination. Physical and financial resources are two tangible assets. The intangibles assets are dynamic, coordination and integration, production and marketing capabilities. Dynamic capabilities approach is an extension of RBV arguing that new and different resources and knowledge is required to adapt to fast changing market dynamics. It therefore is fair to argue that those digitalization efforts can be considered as a dynamic capability process reconfiguring resources to respond to market dynamics. So far, however, there has been little discussion about resource and capability requirements for sound processes leading to successful outcomes. Implementations of strategic projects, such as the FLIP project, depend on the organizational capabilities of their financial, human, and technological resources.

2.3. Organizational, human and financial requirements

It has been shown that technological, organizational and environmental contexts play a role in technology adoption (Leung, Lo, Fong, & Law, 2015). Recent developments in technology utilization have heightened the need for more strategic approaches rather than ad hoc approaches (Turban, Volicino, & Wood, 2013). Recent evidence suggests that not all organizations have the financial resources to implement a strategic approach for utilizing technology. For example, comparing the e-business uses between small and medium-sized and larger tourism enterprises, Brown and Kaewkitipong (2009) demonstrates the role of organizations’ respective sizes and available resources for technology utilization. These studies highlight the need for organizational structure and capacities required for digital destination marketing. This refers to organizational support and stressed as an important precondition for destination collaboration success in the literature (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007).

As discussed later in the paper, it is also important to note that the success of the FLIP project relied not only on a completed app and website, but also continuous support from each historic visitor attraction. This draws our attention to the importance of creating information technology architecture, in the process managing any information technology acquisitions. Turban et al. (2013, p. 402) define IT architecture as ‘a plan for organizing the underlying infrastructure and applications of the IT project’. It is fair to suggest that success of the project relies on the continuous support from each historic visitor attraction and this could only be achieved through the creation of an IT architecture. This draws our attention to the importance of technological capabilities needed to connect and engage destinations with visitors. This is related to the technological support which also is another precondition for destination collaboration success (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007).

Fathian, Akhavan, and Hooral’s (2008) study identified skills and resources as the most important criteria. More pertinent to the area of this paper, Boes, Buhalis, and Inversini (2015) identify leadership, innovation, and social capital supported by human capital as critical components in technology utilization. The last decade has seen an increasing amount of literature on museums and technology (Din & Hecht, 2007). Reporting the results of a survey conducted by 82 museum professionals in 2006, Spinazzi (2007) discusses the issues related to technology adoption in small museums. The study reported that the most significant barriers were lack of financial support in technology utilization, staffing, knowledge of technology and experience with technology. These factors are related to the categories of organizational structure and individual knowledge. This suggest that individual knowledge and willingness to utilize digital marketing tools are also important considerations in technology utilization. This is related to the organizational support which is another precondition for destination collaboration success (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007).

Cheng and Lok (2015) identified the following factors as barriers and challenges in technology utilization faced by travel agencies: inadequate technical knowledge to understand the new technologies,
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دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
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