

Use of *E*-marketing tools as communication management in the tourism industry



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ABSTRACT

Innovative processes in the tourism industry are usually defined by improving customer services and by investing in Information and communication technology (ICTs). Tourism companies cooperate with developing countries and their attractiveness on the international tourism market as well as with communication of the image concept. New technologies facilitate the availability of tourism services by offering customer-friendly services. Although the tourism business is considered as a pioneer in the adoption of new technologies, studies have shown that new technologies often seem to be inadequate, and their impact assessment is not systematic. The aim of this research is to define the potential improvements of the e-marketing within the tourism industry through the characterization of the importance of tourism innovation, evaluation of the key e-marketing communication tool preferences from the point of view of the Lithuanian tourism users. Overall, 384 tourists were surveyed to achieve the research objective. Findings show that e-marketing tools used in the Lithuanian tourism industry are effective, although, there are strategies that are not fully operational or not used at all.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a part of a dynamic service sector that faces global competition and is characterized by continuous changes, which is why, innovation has become crucial in creating and maintaining a competitive advantage. The ability to innovate is the potential of adopting and using new technologies for increased productivity and management, which are referred to as competitive factors. Like other manufacturing or service sectors, tourism companies need innovative improvements in order to survive; otherwise, their products or services may get obsolete and have no demand. Entrepreneurs exploiting global opportunities, having stakeholders' collaboration on this exploitation process can play a significant role. Thus, entrepreneurship process does not have a uniquely correct way of operating and it is essential to achieve the branding destination image and collaboration together with strategical consensus among stakeholders (Burns, Barney, Angus, & Herrick, 2014; Burns, Barney, Angus, & Herrick, 2016; Del Chiappa & Presenza, 2013; Shams, 2016; Tomsett & Shaw, 2015). According to McComb, Boyd, and Boluk (2017), implementing stakeholder collaboration is a continuous process of interrelations based on trust. Metaphorically, Service-Dominant (S-D) logic states that companies and customers always co-create have general high value, thanks to the joint actions and effective communication carried out by a customer/beneficiary and a

service provider during their direct exchanges and integration of resources (Grönroos, 2012; Gummesson & Mele, 2010; Shams & Kaufmann, 2016).

The rapidly changing and modernizing information technology system has an increasing impact on the efficiency of companies' overall performance and the organization of the internal work processes. Currently, the company's ability to use appropriate marketing tools through virtual space is particularly critical for the success in the industry. Companies are forced to cooperate in order to develop new communication tools, as well as diverse channels to reach consumers with the most useful and attractive content that suits their rapidly changing needs. Therefore, growing attention is paid to e-marketing tools. The research of the tourism innovations focuses on and investigates a set of features where a big part of research pieces focuses on information and communication technologies without considering other intensive technologies, the use of which is also steadily growing in the services sector including hotels and transportation. Therefore, tourism firms need numerous resources to accomplish successful results and it is complex to manage power and internationalization processes because every resource has a different source, (Hazra, Fletcher, & Wilkes, 2014; Khojastehpour & Johns, 2014). To face this complexity, the research findings are crucial for government tourism boards, policy-makers, local tourism industries, travel intermediaries and host-

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community representatives (Aqueveque & Bianchi, 2017; Ellis & Sheridan, 2014).

The aim of the research is to figure out and define instructions for future improvements for e-marketing within the tourism industry through the characterization of the tourism innovation importance, evaluation of the key e-marketing communication tool preferences from the point of view of the Lithuanian tourism users.

The question, how far Lithuanian tourism service users tend to use e-marketing tools in the general environment of consumer-oriented innovation grows in importance. The originality of the study is based on the assessment of tourism e-marketing communication tools in a customer approach.

The paper is organised and structured as follows: firstly, Section 2 provides a framework of literature on changes of the tourism communication and innovative approaches focusing on e-marketing solutions in the communication processes. Section 3 presents data and methodology. In Section 4, directions for the improvement of electronic marketing solutions in tourism are drawn. Finally, the last section proposes conclusions and discussions of this study, including implications, limitations and future research areas.

2. Tourism innovations

Innovations in the service sector are often presented as multi-dimensional and are divided into the technological and non-technological categories. While analysing the innovative aspects in services, Carvalho and Costa (2011) place higher emphasis on the organizational level (new services concept, new customer relationship support and service delivery) with new technological opportunities. Service innovation is unique and less visible, and its shape can be more versatile as well as diverse. Social or managerial innovations are not always visible to non-working organizations (Hamel & Prahalad, 1996). Tourism is the field of activity in which innovation is used to gain or strengthen a competitive advantage (Chen, Chen, Ho, & Lee, 2009). Thanks to the changing network of diverse geographic destinations for flights, new routes are expanding to less popular countries as well as areas of mass tourism, which is why the innovations of the incoming tourists can be a way to offer new and higher quality products or services and thus, compete with new tourist attraction centres (Meneses & Teixeira, 2011). While information technologies, mobile technologies, streamline service bookings and customer satisfaction are recognized as main sources of tourism innovation, the idea of tourism innovation has also been recognized as a source of sharing, which has led to more efficient use of personal resources, such as free bedrooms and seating space. Further, innovations in the tourism sector play a key role in the customer orientation. The success of tourism companies depends largely on quick adaptation towards constant demand changes caused by consumers. With the changing pattern of tourists' behaviour, the interests of tourists mainly focus on the experience that can be offered by the visited area. Tourism innovations fall into one of five categories individuated by following scholars (Hall, 2009; Hjalager, 2006; Mei, Arcodia, & Ruhanen, 2010):

- product or service innovation: customer identifies product or service developments as innovation;
- process innovations for new or newly introduced service production or presentation methods to increase efficiency, productivity or flow;
- managerial or organizational innovation: new or newly adapted ways of internal co-operation, workplace organization or internal communication;
- marketing innovations: new or newly applied marketing methods, including generic brand building;
- institutional innovation: new or associate organizational structures and legal conditions that change or improve the conditions for tourism business.

Decelle (2006) classifies the tourism innovations in (1) Technological and non-technological innovations; (2) Innovations of a product or process, organizational solutions or market; (3) Radical, autonomous or inventive innovations. In addition, Gyurácz-Németh, Friedrich, and Clarke (2013) mentioned the three main directions of innovation in the tourism industry identified in the UNWTO conference: innovation in ICTs, product innovation and innovation solutions and emerging challenges.

Successful examples of tourism innovations seem to bring together new or updated tourism products that are of high importance, service features and trends that are all integrated in the tourism industries model. When application patterns are successfully investigated for the tourism innovation, it becomes obvious that most of them share some or all of the issues (such as sustainability, quality management, cost reduction, e-tourism, the use of the Internet and/or mobile applications, consumer friendly approach, CRM - Customer Relationship Management-, eco-friendly effects), with heritage and cultural dimensions using up-to-date marketing strategies. It is also notable that networks/clusters have a positive effect on the ability of tourism operators to innovate through their production or marketing tactics (McComb et al., 2017; Pirnar, Bulut, & Eris, 2012).

With respect to innovations in other branches of the economy, tourism innovations mainly increase operational efficiency and the consumer's perceived value. Tourism service companies have established the quality of their services and have a greater individual user experience as a continuous innovation. This is achieved by predicting customer needs and desires, increasing loyalty through a variety of applications, expanding the range of customers, while reducing unused capacity and increasing efficiency and productivity. Service innovation enables creating value for customers through technology or process optimization. This means, continuous improvement and rationalization of ideas as well as providing employees and clients with more operational powers. The result of tourism innovation is described as a new typological customer experience such as luxury apartments on the A380 aircraft, smart tourism, and replacement of distribution channels (Bilgihan & Nejad, 2015). Successful tourism companies have recognized the importance of "soft" factors that are critical for surviving in a rapidly changing and dynamic business environment. New tourism products that offer unique value to customers are more successful compared to innovations that do not involve or reward customers. This is especially true in the tourism industry where customer involvement in production is deep enough to increase the value of their experience. Enhancing the value of experience here refers to the elements of "entertainment", "education", "aesthetics" and "forgetfulness of everyday life" in order to create great and meaningful tourism products that achieve superior and lasting effectiveness (Baglieri & Consoli, 2009). On the other hand, the introduction of new technologies threatens the activities of traditional tourism intermediaries, such as travel agencies. Internet solutions change the distribution process in the travel business and often result in a less efficient small tour operator's business. Virtual communication capabilities increase the possibilities for the direct communication with customers that reduces costs. Tour operators and agents need to respond effectively to the challenges of a new era by adopting technological innovations, following changes in travel products, consumer demands and should start using the new distribution channels (Ratten, 2010). The challenge for hospitality and tourism is to find optimal digital link between the technology and human activity that would enable the creation of the personal customer experience while respecting their privacy. The use of robotics in providing hospitality services is the closest predicted tourism innovation, which will also have a significant social and economic impact on business (Bilgihan & Nejad, 2015). Indeed, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., the famous Chinese group of electronic commerce, has just inaugurated at the end of December 2018 in Hangzhou (China) the "FlyZoo" hotel that is almost completely managed by robots. Receptionists, staff on the floor and attendants are all robots making the hotel a tourism model of

advanced technology.

Various researchers stress the importance of innovation as an opportunity to extend the maturity stage of the tourism product's life cycle. Innovations help maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and achieve a long-term competitive advantage; the less tangible benefits of successful innovation include strengthening business reputation and increasing customer loyalty (Gyurácz-Németh et al., 2013; Ottenbacher, 2008).

In order to create a long-term competitive advantage, customer perceived value is a critical indicator (Anderson & Kaplan, 2006). The perceptible value of the customers has an important role in designing a tourism system, creating and delivering the new tourism services. Tourist providers are increasingly cooperating to provide customers with interconnected products and collaborative solutions to cater for travel-related needs (Bilgihan & Nejad, 2015). It is necessary to uncover the unique advantages and opportunities of local resources for regional economic and business development. Exploring and developing new tourism resources allows achieving a competitive advantage and new business opportunities. Changes in information and communication technologies have also been driven by the ability of people to acquire and use information to make travel decisions. The adoption of the new technology helps vendors to reach more potential customers, strengthens development, and provides innovative tourism products and services.

2.1. E-marketing solutions in the communication process

E-marketing could be defined as an integrated process by which an enterprise sends a marketing message to a target segment by using Internet and other digital-based marketing tools. E-marketing can use traditional communication tools (sales promotion, advertising, communication with the public) by applying online elements, like a website or an electronic mail. The 8P marketing mix helps to effectively implement the communication strategy, reach the target user, and encourage the use of offers. However, there is a need for continuous improvement: to “track” user steps for the most effective result, so the focus should be online marketing with its elements (virus message, social media networks, mobile environments, etc.). These elements allow to build relationships with consumers via more diverse channels as well as monitor consumer behaviour in the cyberspace.

The elements of the promotion complex have already been adapted to online use, while online marketing includes all the uses of e-marketing on the Internet. By using this element, conventional tools do not include elements in traditional marketing such as viral advertising, keywords using search engines, chat rooms, or blogs, etc.

Radzevičiūtė and Šliburytė, (2005, p. 6) present the elements of the e-marketing communication complex and their most popular forms on

the Internet (Fig. 1).

The biggest advantage of e-marketing is that the internet can be used to provide services at every stage of the product's sale: before selling, selling and post-sales, maintaining relationships. “It covers all processes from business management to new customer search and service delivery to existing customers” (Dominici, 2009: p. 19). E-marketing is usually an integral part of the overall marketing strategy of the entire company, the purpose of which is to focus on the use of the Internet: identifying the target market of the company; understanding how consumers behave online; forming an opinion about the company's brand; increasing the awareness of the brand online.

E-marketing effectiveness indicators that describe consumer behaviour are best investigated through Web analytics. Analytical programs allow to track and control different processes on the Internet. Website analysis allows for measuring the effectiveness of electronic marketing efforts and improving functionality to increase the volume of users and sales. By collating these indicators and collecting findings about your business, you can improve your site's resources, make design changes, modify internal content, reorganize performance, and remove functional failures such as optimizing keywords used by SEO or Google AdWords. These search engine optimization programs enable businesses to calculate click-through rates, cost per click, and cost per mile, ad impressions, and many more.

The growing trend of e-tourism depends on factors other than perceived ease of purchasing because online and offline environments do not create similar shopping perceptions for consumers. Therefore, it can be deduced that consumer perceptions represent an effective technique for the e-marketing of tourist actors (Chiu, 2009). Evaluating the effectiveness of e-marketing is necessary when the business is oriented towards the electronic space and the use of its tools. In order to achieve greater efficiency, it is important to evaluate indicators in a given industry, since indicators alone do not provide any useful information and do not reflect the final results of the campaign. In addition, it is necessary to link the evaluation indicators of e-marketing and traditional marketing campaigns with each other in order to maximize the result. All these indicators need to be linked to the key business indicators, which must be tailored to the objectives accordingly.

3. Data and methods

The opportunities for the development of the cultural, business, health and ECO tourism services and products in Lithuania are favourable due to the Lithuania's convenient geographical location with respect to the precedence tourism markets and valuable natural and cultural potential, as well as preserved vivid landscape and the abundance of the historical and ethnic ties with foreign countries. Local tourism has not been receiving sufficient attention lately, which

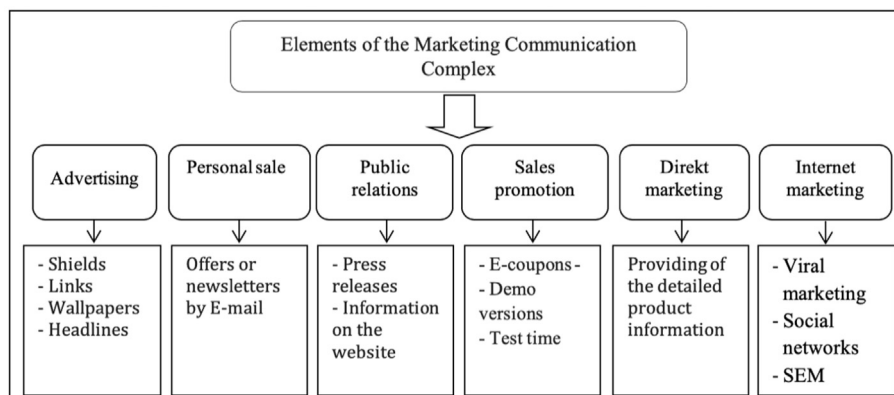


Fig. 1. Elements of the marketing communication complex. Source: our processing based on Radzevičiūtė and Šliburytė (2005), Bumblys (2007)

subsequently has been affecting the competitiveness of the tourism sector. Meaning, enhanced competition would not only encourage foreign tourists to visit Lithuania, but it would also inspire more Lithuanians to travel within the country and learn more about its unique landscape, rich cultural heritage and history whilst simultaneously contributing to the regional economic development.

According to the [Lithuanian Statistical data \(2018\)](#), the number of Lithuanian tourists taking overnight trips was 826.9 thousand in 2017. Most trips of domestic tourists would not last long – usually just 1–3 overnight stays. Visiting relatives and friends remained the most popular purpose of these trips, and cars remained the most popular choice as the means of transport. The largest expenditures of domestic tourists were incurred in Klaipėda county (in 2017, 30% of the total expenditure of domestic tourists).

In 2017, compared to 2016, the number of same-day visitors decreased by 7.7% and amounted to about 1.4 million. On their trips, same-day visitors usually visited relatives and friends, went for leisure and recreation or to do shopping. Same-day trips to Vilnius and Kaunas counties predominated. In 2017, most of the residents travelling within Lithuania with one or more overnight stays gave a very good or good assessment to their trips, only 0.7% – satisfactory. According to the survey data, in 2017, there were 89 trips with an overnight stay per 100 population. Per-capita expenditure on trips within Lithuania totalled, on average, EUR 66 per year. People aged 15–44 travelled the most (56%). The proportions of travelling men and women were roughly equal: men made up 48, women – 52% of all domestic travellers ([Statistics Lithuania, 2018](#): p. 44).

Every company operating in the Lithuanian tourism sector uses e-marketing tools to attract visitors, promote repeat visits, this is why, it is important for companies to measure the effectiveness of their marketing activities. The core issue of the research is that the possibilities of using e-marketing tools are very strong, yet the biggest challenges associated with the marketing still occur when consumer expectations are not met effectively. Therefore, the paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of e-marketing tools used in the Lithuanian tourism sector through the user's prism.

That is why the general population of the local tourists visiting Lithuania was surveyed. The survey, carried out entirely through direct interviews, represents the unique source of the data subsequently processed. Data were collected from June to August 2018 by means of a face-to-face structured questionnaire administrated by the employees of tourism information centres in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda to the tourists randomly selected in the tourist centre. The major Lithuanian cities were chosen for the research because they cover 80% of local tourist flows. The general research population was chosen based on the Lithuanian Department of Statistics data from 2017 indicating that 322 thousand local tourists visited Lithuanian tourism information centres that year. The simple random sample methodology was used where each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the study. The sample size was 384 local tourists in Lithuania with the probability of 95%. Local tourists were selected for the research survey because Lithuanian tourism companies utilizing the e-marketing tool typically provide information in Lithuanian language. Another reason for the selection of the survey participants was the language barrier of the information centres staff.

Table 1
The priority of the information sources.

Alternatives for the choice	The choice	The number of respondents	%
www.google.lt or contact the office of a service company	www.google.lt	319	83%
www.tic.lt or in the office of the tourism information	www.tic.lt	276	72%
www.booking.com or on the website of a hotel	www.booking.com	272	63%
The website or the mobile application	Website	339	88%
Social networks or recommendations of friends and relatives	Recommendations of friends and relatives	198	52%

Source: our elaborations based on a questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire content was developed according to the previously researched literature. The structure of the questionnaire consists of a demographic part, a section related to the objectives of the research and two control questions were added for the reliability of the survey. The questionnaire is structured according to the main research questions: the priority of the information sources, the willingness of respondents to recommend an e-communication tool, assessment of the electronic information within accommodation services, assessment of the online information about the accommodation services.

A pilot test, administrated to 12 respondents who were experts in the tourism (public and private) sector, was developed to support questionnaire design with the objective to determine the questionnaire's limits and to improve the understanding of the items. Results from the pilot test provided some revisions before distributing the final questionnaire. Tourists in Lithuania were surveyed using a written questionnaire with the answers provided (closed-ended questions). Three hundred eighty-four tourists filled out the questionnaire, of which 7 questionnaires were removed. This survey aimed at finding out how local tourists visiting the country learn about Lithuanian tourist attractions and their views on e-marketing. This is an effective research method used to gather certain types of information about the problem being investigated.

4. Results

According to the research data, most respondents, 70% are looking for the information in the specialized search engines like [www.google.com](#). Eleven percent of respondents selected the answer “other” and indicated the following information channels: [www.booking.com](#); [www.airbnb.com](#); [www.agoda.com](#); [www.hostelston.com](#); family recommendations. The most common answer was [www.booking.com](#); it has been selected 34 times. Nine percent of respondents indicated that they obtain information via social networks including consulting groups. Other information channels are not so popular and only 2–3% of respondents chose them. To determine the preference of e-marketing tools for the traditional measures, respondents were asked to select a more appropriate answer from the two possible options. Obtained results show ([Table 1](#)) that 83% of respondents chose this option for a more selective answer to the e-marketing tool, searches for information on [www.google.com](#) or live accommodation. When choosing between the physical or online tourism information centres, more respondents opted for the Internet - 72%. The answers are very evenly distributed among the social networking and recommendation from a nearby environment. Social networks were selected by 48% of respondents while 52% of the respondents chose to go with the recommendations from family and friends, which indicates that there is a lack of trust in the social space.

Respondents were asked to evaluate tools of the electronic communications on a 1–5 Likert scale (just one option was possible). The most reliable communication tool selected by 20% of respondents was the website. It is notable that the information that is provided on the website while placing an order or a reservation increase customer trust, although many rebuked that the information often provided might not always correspond to the reality. Also, one of the most reliable means of communication is e-mail (16%) and social networking (16%). The

Table 2
The willingness of respondents to recommend an e-communication tool.

Tools	Number of choices	Frequency (%) by choice	Frequency (%) by the number of respondents
Website	156	17%	41,4%
Social networks	82	9%	21,8%
Search engines (www.google.lt , etc.)	190	20,7%	50,4%
Tourism information terminals	23	2,5%	6,1%
Blogs	38	4,1%	10,1%
Reservations systems (www.booking.com , etc.)	244	26,6%	64,7%
Newsletters	79	8,6%	21%
Videos	15	1,6%	4%
Forums	42	4,6%	11,1%
Mobile applications	17	1,9%	4,5%
Tourism information websites (www.tic.lt)	30	3,3%	8%
Total	916	100%	-

Source: our elaborations based on a questionnaire survey.

partially reliable communication tool was attributed to mobile applications (13%) and blogs (13%). The least trusting means of communication are e-coupons (9%), forums (7%) and videos (5%). An important criterion for evaluating e-marketing effectiveness is the recommendation, and the respondents were asked about what e-tools would be recommended to their relatives looking for information about accommodation services. The results are presented in Table 2.

Respondents were able to choose more than one tool that they would recommend, so the number of choices did not adhere to 384, but it increased to 916. The most secure tool is the reservation systems as selected by 65% of the respondents. Another popular tool is search engines like www.google.com, they were chosen by half of all respondents. A smaller part - 41% of the respondents - identified the accommodation facility's website as a preferable information source. Newsletters and social networks collected one fifth of the recommendations. The lowest percentage of video was collected (4%). The results indicate that e-marketing tools are effective especially for the reservation systems and search engines.

During the survey the respondents also assessed the reliability, completeness and relevance of the information provided electronically within the accommodation services (see Table 3.). Likert scale where „1“is very good, „2“is good, „3“is satisfactory, „4“is bad, and „5“is very bad was used to evaluate the electronic information.

The survey results indicate that respondents are satisfied with the electronic information about the accommodation services. Information reliability received the highest satisfaction score while information completeness received lower scores. However, overall results with the electronic information within the accommodation services are satisfactory. The effectiveness of the e-marketing tools has also been analysed on the basis of the brand awareness and importance criteria. Research results are presented in Table 4.

The assessment of the online information about the accommodation services indicates that electronic advertising has a positive impact on respondents. Respondents recognize the logo and name of the institution providing accommodations, which positively influences the increased brand awareness. Additionally, electronic advertisements boost interest in an institution and encourage consumers to seek more information about the institution and its offers. This consumer interest increases the possibilities of services by the establishment. However,

Table 3
Assessment on the electronic information within accommodation services.

Key characteristics	X (average) + CI (confidence interval)	X (average) - CI (confidence interval)	Results
Reliability	2.30	2.12	good
Completeness	2.44	2.27	good
Relevance	2.40	2.22	good

Source: our elaborations based on a questionnaire survey.

the results also show that tourists tend not to change or slightly change the existing opinion about the organization and its services.

The study found that electronic communication systems offer much more flexibility for the consumers of the Lithuanian tourism when selecting and comparing services provided by different establishments. 311 (81%) respondents pointed out that e-marketing communication tools help with the selection of offers that meet their needs. The criteria for the price selection are almost equally important as indicated by half of all the respondents. The visual presentation of electronic advertising is also critical to consumers and it was noted by one fifth of the respondents. The study also revealed that local Lithuanian tourists are not loyal to the same accommodation establishment and consider the price that is offered at the time. The number of respondents who rely only on other people's recommendation is lower than 1%.

5. Directions for the improvement of the electronic marketing solutions in tourism

The analysis of the research results helps to identify several areas where tourism information technologies can be used more effectively. Based on the experience of tourists obtained from the survey, several recommendations can be made for improving e-marketing solutions in the Lithuanian tourism sector:

1. It is difficult to find the right information (mentioned by 33% of respondents):
 - *Realisation of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO).* The tourism industry organizations should invest in SEO services in order to significantly increase their sales, because a high number of tourists use the Google search engine. SEO is a very important part of e-marketing for tourism companies that strive to achieve better results. This can be achieved through paying more focused attention to search engines and optimizing web pages, earning high search result positions, searching for partners on the Internet, exploiting the opportunities offered by the social networks on the internet.
 - *The content of the website.* The focus of the website's audit on research should be dedicated towards content (targeted, relevant, comprehensive, updated daily, including channels from other sites, links to third-party websites to improve the reach of the target market).
 - *Reservation systems.* Tourists often book via reservation systems and they will be advised to their 'relatives' courageously. This experience shows that it is important to accommodate hotel offers in various reservation systems, since most orders come from this source. The purpose of booking systems is simple - to facilitate the search and reservation process. The benefits come from both sides: for tourists - everything is in one place, and for institutions - a greater audience reach.
 - *Information terminals.* Information terminals are currently in many

Table 4
Assessment of the online information about the accommodation services.

Statement	X (average) + CI (confidence interval)	X (average) - CI (confidence interval)	Results
The institution logo is more noticeable	2.85	2.65	Agree
More attention is paid to the institution name	2.61	2.43	Agree
Greater visibility of the institution activities	2.57	2.39	Agree
Promotes to seek additional information about the institution	2.57	2.35	Agree
Promotes to seek additional information about the offers by the institution	2.44	2.24	Agree
Changed the previously held opinion about the institution	3.00	2.82	No Opinion

Source: our elaborations based on a questionnaire survey.

Lithuanian cities but according to the survey data, tourists are confronted with the fact that they are not working, information is outdated or not convenient for use. Therefore, in order to change the perceptible belief that information terminals are unreliable tools of communication, it is firstly necessary to pull forces and make changes in the technical parameters and in the content of the information. It is important to provide useful and up-to-date information and follow user steps, so you know exactly what content the consumers need and want.

2. Not enough improved modern tools of e-communication (mentioned by 27% of respondents):

- *Communication via the social networks.* Social networks are considered to be one of the most reliable tools, but the content of the communication is often superfluous and irrelevant. While creating the communication content for social networks it is necessary to consider events occurring in the targeted markets at that time, to be in a “whirlwind of events”, to talk about the topical issues.
- *Mobile applications.* The report of the [Lithuanian Communications Regulatory Authority \(2017\)](#) shows that more than 25% of all Internet service subscribers in Lithuania use only the mobile communication and the number of mobile users is growing. According to the survey results, a small number of tourists use mobile applications for information because the information seems to be unreliable, but current usage trends indicate that mobile applications are an expanding niche that needs to be properly and timely managed and utilized by the tourism companies.
- *Virtual reality.* According to the [Lithuanian Department of Tourism \(2018\)](#), one of the latest promotional tools in tourism marketing is a virtual reality, which has recently been a particularly fast developing technology. Lithuanians are not very confident in developing videos but the situation with virtual reality technologies can change considerably. The 360-degree camera on the video clip can be used to present tourist objects, accommodation or other places in a modern way. They help to present the country's competitive advantages in an innovative and original way. Concepts like place image and territorial attractiveness deal with measurable factors influencing business units and people ([Angelis & Dimaki, 2011](#)). Following this approach, it is possible to improve places' image by means of marketing and promotion tools that underline and highlight the crucial qualities of places. Place can be considered market-driven business, could be made product attractive as in places' branding processes ([Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993](#)), by changing the mental map of entrepreneurs ([Musolino, 2018](#); [Spencer & Dixon, 1983](#)). This map represents a way to organize data and make them attractive enough to ‘tempt people out of their habitual rounds’ ([Tuan, 1975](#); [Van den Bosch, 1977](#)).
- *Hashtags.* One of the most popular sources of information search and communication is social networking, so tourists often face the problem of not finding the right information. Therefore, social networking should not only be a search option, but also include filtering. Developing e-marketing on social networks with the goal to attract a younger market it is expedient to use hashtags, filter

content and contribute to the creation of visibility. The well-known badge # increases the visibility of the post. It is important for the tourist service offices or for the place to be described to choose and use a playlist that is easy to remember and perfectly suited or desirable. Tourists will be able to find all the information and content created by the tourism companies and the tourists themselves.

3. Poor level of personalization of the e-communication (mentioned by 22% of respondents):

- *Development of Customer Relationship Management (CRM).* Global practice shows that this is a great way to not only communicate with customers, partners, and suppliers, collect information about them, but also to increase the efficiency of work processes and sales. Institutions operating in the tourism sector are required to manage customer relations as there is currently a lack of communication and feedback on the surveyed data. Fast communication, personalized suggestions, recommendations for tourist needs will increase purchases or visits.

Assessment the effectiveness of e-marketing tools within the tourism industry indicates that e-marketing tools used in the tourism sector are effective: surely, there are tools that are not yet fully exploited or widely used. Websites, social networks, emailing, reservation systems are the tools that are recommended for businesses with high performance in the tourism industry. Mobile applications are not very reliable and do not meet the needs of users fully, but the interest is growing. According to the tourists, information terminals have more deficiencies than advantages and therefore, it is necessary to make improvements. Chat forums or blogging recommendations do not surpass “live”- in person conversations with loved ones. Therefore, these tools cannot be considered effective at this time. However, the overall assessment of all the measures indicates that e-marketing tools are effective and there are areas that are recommended for improvement.

6. Conclusions and considerations

Innovations provide opportunity to extend the maturity stage of the tourism product's life cycle. They help to maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and achieve a long-term competitive advantage. New tourism products that offer unique value to customers are more successful than innovations without rewarding customers and their involvement.

E-marketing can be defined as an integrated process by which a company sends a marketing message to the target segment using internet or other digital-based marketing tools. E-marketing can include traditional communication tools (personalized sales, sales promotion, advertising, public relations) by connecting online items: website, e-mail, viral messages, social networks, SEO, mobile environments, blogs, forums, and more. Assessing the effectiveness of e-marketing tools used by the tourism companies leads to the conclusion that e-marketing tools used in the Lithuanian tourism industry are effective, even if there are measures that are not yet fully operational or are not used at all. Websites, social networks, emails, reservation pages are the tools that

are recommended for businesses with high performance in the tourism industry. Mobile applications are not very reliable and do not meet the needs of users fully, but the interest is growing. According to the tourists, information terminals have more deficiencies than advantages and therefore, it is necessary to make improvements of this measure. Chat forums or blogging recommendations do not surpass “live” conversations with loved ones. Therefore, these tools cannot be considered effective at this time. However, the overall assessment of all the measures indicates that e-marketing tools are effective and there are areas for improvement.

The present study can contribute both from a theoretical and practical point of view. In fact, it gives some insights and delivers a framework for assessing the effectiveness of e-marketing tools. Understanding the operativity of the e-tourism tools can represent a useful starting point for managing marketing strategies within tourism firms and for designing policy intervention by local and national authorities.

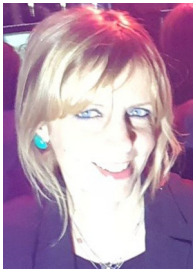
Further empirical research is needed to test and validate this preliminary framework developed. Specifically, future research will include other tools not considered effective at this time and other areas in Lithuania. Secondary data from research and official statistics could also be considered in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena, thus, making the research more robust. Indeed, triangulation methodology (Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003) as qualitative research strategy can validate results thanks to the convergence of info from various sources. In addition, the study could be expanded to other European countries, in order to carry out spatial structural equation model.

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