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The Utilization of Social Media Marketing in Destination Management Organizations

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The Utilization of Social Media Marketing in Destination Management Organizations

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Abstract
The emerging use of social media fundamentally changes the communication and interaction of societies and organizations. The use of social media revolutionizes the way organizations market their products and interact with their customers. Social media acts as an agent of change within the marketing and communication of organizations. In particular, the tourism sector is affected by these disruptive changes. Social media influences and changes the interaction between touristic supply and demand sides fundamentally. These upcoming opportunities and challenges are especially relevant for destination management organizations (DMOs), which try to coordinate and market the intangible and immaterial tourism product of a destination. Social media marketing transforms the classical marketing and communication of these destination management organizations. Nevertheless, destination management organizations are still in an experimental stage of utilizing social media as a marketing tool, as they slowly start to realize the potential benefits of social media as an agent of change. This study investigates how DMOs in alpine regions implement social media marketing in their classical marketing strategies through a quantitative survey. Furthermore, the paper outlines which upcoming challenges and opportunities DMOs face by conducting qualitative interviews with social media managers in the destinations. Finally, implications and recommendations for DMOs are presented to cope with the emerging use of social media as a marketing tool.

Keywords: *Destination Marketing**,** Destination Management Organizations**,** Social Media**,** Social Media Marketing**,** Tourism Marketing*

Track: *Management & Leadership*

Word count: *8.654*

1. Literature Review

1.1 Social media as an agent of change

The emerging use of social media has fundamentally altered the communication and interaction of humans (Shu-Chuan & Yoojung 2011, Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015) and how humans disseminate information (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Social media applications enable customers to present their thoughts, opinions and ideas through user-generated content in social networks and make them visible to a big crowd. Therefore, social media is more than a technological development; it is a social innovation (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015; Amersdorfer, Bauhuber & Öllrich, 2012) and it is claimed to be the *"modus*

operandi of the 21st century" (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012, p. 193). Especially in an entrepreneurial and organizational context, the use of social media revolutionizes the way organizations market their products/services and communicate with their customers (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017; Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015). Social media therefore acts as an agent of change within the marketing and communication of organizations.

The tourism sector is particularly affected by these disruptive digital changes (Landvogt, 2017; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), especially regarding the interaction between supply and demand sides (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Arsal, Backman & Baldwin, 2008; Law, Leung & Buhalis, 2009). Social media not only fundamentally influences and changes the customer journey, but also how tourism providers market and distribute their product portfolio (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Arsal et al., 2008). In the context of tourism destination marketing, social media has led to disruptive changes in the past decade (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Buhalis & Law, 2008). Social media marketing offers tourism destinations numerous opportunities to foster the relationship between the supply and demand sides (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2013). Nevertheless, Munar (2012) postulates that even though there is strong interest in the effects of digitization in tourism, only little empirical evidence exists regarding the strategic extent and effects of social media marketing at the destination level.

Destination management organizations (DMO) are still in an experimental stage of utilizing social media applications as a marketing tool (Usalki, Koc & Sönmez, 2017). They slowly start to realize the potential benefits of social media as an agent of change. Hays, Page & Buhalis (2013, p. 213) therefore claim "*[...] a clear understanding of why and how social media function is vital to tourism destination marketing".*

1.2. Social media marketing

"Social media is no longer a trend for marketers: It is a reality" (Chung & Austria, 2010, p. 582). The introduction of Web 2.0 alters the communication and interaction behavior of organizations (Ngai, Tao & Moon, 2015; MacKay, Barbe, Van Winkle & Halpenny, 2017). As an integral part of Web 2.0, social media can be defined as *"[...] a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Social media is more than just social networking and content sharing sites; it also includes blogs, business networking sites, collaborative sites, commerce communities, podcasts, educational material sharing, as well as open source software (Anderson, 2007). These channels influence the customer's behavior in terms of awareness, information seeking, attitudes, decision-making, purchasing and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media supports social structures and interactions online (Hinterholzer & Joos, 2013) by posting and sharing content on social networks like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram or Twitter (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Sigala, Gretzel & Christou, 2012). Social media applications enable users to spread their own thoughts, opinions and ideas through user-generated content in social networks and make them visible to a global crowd (Hays et al., 2013). Before the emergent use of Web 2.0, organizations were able to manage and control the content available to their customers and build a certain brand to align with how they want to be perceived by their customers (MacKay et al., 2017). "*With this rise in social media, it appears that corporate*

communication has been democratized. The power has been taken from those in marketing and public relations by the individuals and communities that create, share, and consume blogs, tweets, Facebook entries, movies, pictures, and so forth." (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 242). The term user-generated content (UGC) thus refers to the way users share their ideas in the form of blogposts, videos or photos and interact with each other (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012) and refers to *"a mixture of fact and opinion, impression and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor"* (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006, p. 4)., From a marketing perspective, it is helpful to take a more consumer-centered approach. Several researches propose to use the term consumer generated content (CGC) instead, as this term puts emphasis on the commercial use of social media as a marketing tool, which refers to online information created, initiated, spread and used by consumers with the intention to give recommendations and opinions on products or organizations (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012).

Within the 21st century, social media became an integral and indispensable part of the marketing and communication of organizations (Felix et al., 2017). Already in 2004 Holloway proclaimed that "*information and communication technology, as it is now known, has come to play a key role in all elements of the marketing mix, and the new term recognizes the importance of communication in the interface between a business and its customers. Electronic, or 'online' communications have become affordable and practicable for even the smallest SMEs, and no sector of the travel industry is unaffected by this revolution."* (Holloway, 2004, p. 197-198). Barker et al. (2012, p. 3) define social media marketing as follows: *"Social media marketing (SMM) uses social media portals to positively influence consumers toward a website, company, brand, product, service, or a person. Typically, the end goal of social media marketing is a "conversion," such as the purchase of a product, subscription to a newsletter, registration in an online community, or some other desirable consumer action."* Social media marketing aims to support an organization to achieve their marketing goals. Through the combination with traditional marketing tools, products/services can be advertised virally on social networks to a bigger audience (Felix et al., 2017). Social media marketing enables customers to move from passive consumption of advertising messages to conjoint interaction with an organization and other customers (Zehrer & Grabmüller, 2012). Social media marketing enriches the traditional communication strategies of classical marketing (Felix et al., 2017). Social media marketing thus offers several advantages to companies and organizations as its applications emerge as an influential and low-cost marketing tool with a global reach (Usakli et al., 2017). Furthermore, through social media, the scope of marketing activities is no longer limited to the geographical location of the organization (Lange-Faria, 2012).

1.3 Social media marketing in the context of tourism destinations

In the tourism industry, social media has changed the way in which potential guests disseminate and how potential tourism suppliers create information (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The tourism product is an intangible and immaterial bundle of services, which is considered to be a highly information-intense purchase with high involvement (Bieger, 2004). Due to these inherent characteristics, potential customers seek reliable information about potential destinations as well as about possible activities within the destination before and during their consumption (Munar, 2012; Usakli et al., 2017).

Therefore, user-generated content on social media is a relevant source of information, which influences the whole customer journey (Amaro, Duarte & Henriques, 2016).

Social media applications are thus used along the whole customer journey, which includes the pre-travel phase, the consumption phase and the post-travel phase (Minazzi, 2014). During the pre-travel phase, potential travelers use social media for inspiration. Applications such as Pinterest, Youtube and Blogs are used to generate an image of the future destination and to communicate with like-minded consumers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). Potential travelers use social media to get specific information about activities, restaurants and tourist attractions to plan their future journey (Amaro, Duarte & Henriques, 2016). Especially relevant within this phase are online recommendations and ratings on platforms like Tripadvisor, Facebook and HolidayCheck, generated from other consumers (Miguens, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Also during the consumption phase, travelers actively use the social media platforms mentioned for decision-making and as a source of information for activities within the destination (Gretzel, 2009; Cox, Bourgess, Sellitta & Buultjens, 2009). During the post-travel phase, social media enables virtual storytelling for the consumers and also provides a sense of belonging to virtual travel communities (Gretzel, 2009; Fesenmaier, & O'Leary, 2006; Fotis, Buhalis & Rossides, 2012). Moreover, travelers share their experiences during and after the journey in form of videos and photos on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The diffusion of CGC on blogs, social networks and video portals provides potential and actual customers with reliable information about the destination from other customers; it enables them to share independent opinions and spread the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their purchase (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Through sharing personal experiences and recommendations during and after their journey on social networks, consumers generate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which is spread virally to a bigger and more global audience (Phelps et al. 2004; Thorson & Rodgers 2006; Dwyer 2007; Hung & Li 2007; Shu-Chuan & Yoojung, 2011). Social media applications therefore act as a multiplier of eWOM and as an enabler of direct interaction between customers (Hudson, Roth, Madden & Huddson, 2015; Landvogt, 2017).

Tourismus organizations need to listen, engage with customers and react to their complaints in order to prevent negative eWOM (Kietzmann et al., 2011). History has shown how CGC can harm an enterprise if not reacting properly to customer complaints. The story of Dave Carroll with United Airlines breaking his guitar is just one good example (Carroll, 2013). Many executives still do not fully understand the power of social media and ignore both, opportunities and threats, which can come from consumers (Berthon et al., 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Culnan, McHugh & Zubillaga (2010) point out the importance of implementing a strategy when applying social media into their marketing mix. Companies need to develop a social media strategy, which aligns with the corporate marketing strategy, and includes goal setting, defining the target audience, analyzing competitors and setting activities. Goals may vary, from brand building to an increase in customer satisfaction, driving eWOM (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011; Barker et al., 2012). Examples from big companies have proven that strategic social media marketing leads to returns by creating turnover or saving costs. However, many companies still fail to monitor the economic impact of social media marketing (Barker et al., 2012).

Social media as a marketing tool in a touristic context is especially relevant for destination management organizations (DMOs) (Munar, 2012). In alpine tourism areas, DMOs act as leading institutions in coordinating the various tourism providers and managing the immaterial and intangible tourism product (Peters & Strobl, 2013). Due to the community-based nature of alpine tourism destinations, they can be described as amalgams of stakeholders with a big variety of touristic offers (Buhalis, 2000).

Alpine tourism destinations in the Tyrol differ from corporately managed destinations in Northern America, as their structures emerge from the local community and embedded stakeholders (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). Tyrolean DMOs are collectively financed and characterized by a strong municipality. Furthermore, there is strong presence of family-owned small and medium sized enterprises (Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Strobl & Peters, 2013). Until 2002, 254 small DMOs existed in the Tyrol; nearly every municipality had its own DMO. In 2002, the Tyrolean government decided to merge the DMOs to benefit from synergetic effects and a stronger marketing appearance. This merging process was carried out gradually until 2008. Since 2008, 34 DMOs on a local level manage and coordinate the touristic alpine tourism offer. The Tirol Werbung as the subordinate regional tourism organization tries to bundle the activities of the local DMOs and market the region as an alpine winter and summer destination (Lehar & Reisner, 2015). The primary functions of DMOs are 1) tourism destination planning and development, 2) coordination and improvement of the destination offer and the infrastructure, 3) network-building and representation of interests among stakeholders and 4) strategic and operative marketing of the destination, including destination branding and positioning, coordinating marketing strategies, promotion and distribution of the tourism product and providing information for customers (Munar, 2012; Bieger, 2004).

For this study, strategic and operative marketing is of high interest, as DMOs try to market and promote the intangible and immaterial bundle of products of a destination to potential and existing customers as a whole (Munar, 2012; Bieger, 2004). Their core function is the creation and promotion of a strong inimitable destination brand (Munar, 2012). For destinations, the technological and social innovation of social media is a major driver for competitive advantage (Munar, 2012) and this new form of marketing has transformed the classical marketing and communication of these destination management organizations (Aldebert, Dang & Longhi, 2011). Destination management organizations are obliged to be present on various channels and to communicate with potential and actual customers throughout the whole customer journey. However, it also enables them to interact directly and communicate in reciprocal ways with customers (Kiralova & Pavliceka, 2015). Quinton (2013, p. 913) claims that the *"linear, relational, exchange-based partnerships"* that organizations had with their customers are no more valid and that there has been a power shift to more reciprocal and collaborative communication between demand and supply side. As a collaborative marketing tool, organizations can give feedback, react to recommendations, interact and influence users on social networks (Hvass & Munar, 2012). Thereby, social media applications act as an agent of change by enabling co-creation of content between the supply and demand side (Usakli et al., 2017).

The viral characteristic of social media marketing has resulted in a greater need for

destination management organizations to actively participate on social networks (MacKay et al., 2017). Nevertheless, previous studies indicate that DMOs are still in an embryonic stage of using social media channels as an advertising tool and generally perform on a modest level when it comes to interacting and communicating with tourists virally (Usakli et al., 2017). The majority of DMOs simply transfer their existing marketing activities to social networks, rather than exploiting the whole potential of these applications and integrating social media into their existing marketing strategies (Usakli et al., 2017). Although research on the phenomenon of social media marketing in a touristic context is an emergent area of interest among scholars, few studies identify the utilization of social media marketing in destination management organizations (Usalki et al., 2017; Munar, 2012; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Alizadeh & Mat Isa, 2014, Hays et al., 2013). Furthermore, few studies show the strategic dimensions, which come along with the utilization of social media for DMOs (Munar, 2012), as the phenomenon social media has largely been examined from a demand perspective (Aye, Au & Law, 2012; Lee, Lowry & Delconte, 2015). The majority of existing research investigates the demand side and focuses on the traveler's social media behavior before, during and after the consumption of the tourism product (Usalki et al., 2017). *"This findingindicates that there is still ample room for research about suppliers' perspective such as in communication, management, and market research."* (Lee, Lowry & Delconte, 2015, p. 6) Consequently, there exists little understanding of how destination management organizations are integrating social media marketing into their marketing strategies (Alizadeh & Mat, 2015; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). It is assumed that social media thus generates opportunities and challenges for DMOs. There is a strong claim in tourism management literature to understand how these destination management organizations implement social media to market the destination and the fragmented tourism product and which challenges and opportunities occur regarding marketing and communication through social media (Usalki et al., 2017; Munar, 2012; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012; Alizadeh & Mat, 2014, Hays et al., 2013, Stankov Lazic & Dragicevic, 2010).

This study therefore focuses on the strategic scope as well as operative practices of the use of social media for DMOs in an alpine context, more specifically in the Austrian region of the Tyrol. Furthermore, this paper aims to close this existing research gap by exploring the utilization of social media marketing in destination management in the Austrian region of Tyrol with the following research questions:

1) How do destination management organizations integrate/implement social media marketing within their marketing strategies?
2) Which challenges may occur for destination marketing organizations regarding social media marketing?
3) Which potential opportunities may arise for destination marketing organizations regarding social media marketing?

To conclude, the paper derives recommendations and implications for DMOs on how to successfully implement social media into their destination marketing, overcome potential challenges and benefit from upcoming opportunities.

2. Empirical Study

2.1 Methodology

The study at hand analyses the social media utilization of destination management organizations in the Austrian province of Tyrol. As past research on social media has focused either on quantitative or qualitative methods (Lee, Lowry & Delconte, 2015), this study applies a mixed-method approach which is divided into three phases. In a first step, the presence of 34 Tyrolean DMOs on social media channels as well as available performance indicators were captured through desk research in August 2016 and May 2017. In a second step, a quantitative survey was conducted to analyze the use of social media in these 34 destination management organizations in the Tyrol. Therefore, social media managers within each DMO were invited to complete a quantitative online questionnaire regarding their strategic approach and operational management of social media within their marketing activities as well as daily challenges and opportunities for marketing their destination. This online survey was online from February 14th until March 30th, 2017. The response rate was high, with 97% (33 out of 34 DMOs) participating in this survey. Data was analyzed with SPSS.

Based on these findings, qualitative interviews with social media managers in various destinations where conducted to identify the potential opportunities and challenges of social media marketing in tourism. *"Qualitative research provides complementary insights into quantitative research to gain an understanding about how DMO social media strategies are spoken of and conceived versus how they are actually executed."* (Hays et al., 2013, S. 217) With this in mind, the aim of this qualitative part of the study was to identify potential opportunities and challenges of social media in tourism DMOs. 12 qualitative guided interviews were carried out in summer 2017. These were recorded, transcribed and paraphrased following the qualitative content analysis of Mayring. The authors decided to reduce the material through abstraction in order to interpret data material and thus apply the summary approach as an inductive category formation. Furthermore, the software MAXQDA was used for paraphrasing (Mayring, 2014). The analysis focuses on the central questions of integration of social media into the marketing strategy: opportunities and challenges of social media for DMOs. The 12 participating DMOs were furthermore divided into three categories according to their budget of 2015 to analyze differences within smaller and bigger entities: while 4 DMOs (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO4) have a budget of more than € 6.5 million per year, 5 are in between 3.0 to 6.5 million (DMO5, DMO6, DMO7, DMO8, DMO9) and further 3 below € 3.0 million (DMO10, DMO11, DMO12).

2.2 Findings & Discussion

Utilization of Social Media in Destination Management Organizations

Desk research has shown that Tyrolean DMOs are present on a total of 13 Social Media channels. While all of them are present on Facebook, 91% are on YouTube, 85% on Instagram, 82% on Google+, 73% on Twitter, 62% run their own blog and 58% use Flickr. Only 44% run a Pinterest, 32% an Issuu, 18% a Vimeo and 12% a WhatsApp account. Two destinations use Tumblr and only one destination uses Snapchat. 4 DMOs claim to be present on 4 other channels which have not been listed in the survey. The intensity however varies

from just one channel up to 10 channels (3 DMOs). Further 9 DMOs are rather present on 9 and 6 DMOs on 8 channels.

Performance indicators analyzed through desk research show a high diversity of the intensity of utilization. Facebook fans vary from 1,000 to 145,000, Check-Ins from 8 to 163,000 and the number of evaluations from 9 to 6,200. Evaluations are rather positive with means reaching from 4.5 to 4.9. Only one DMO shows an evaluation of 4.1 on average. A similar picture emerges from YouTube. Views range from 28,900 to 5.7 million. Numbers highly depend on the entry date and the size of the DMO. While the first ones already started to run a YouTube channel in 2009, others only followed in 2015. The presence on Instagram shows a similar pattern. Posts vary from 6 to 1,800; followers from 60 to 21,400. Again, the performance depends on the size of the DMO, but also on posts concerning mega events within the region, such as the Hahnenkamm ski race in Kitzbühel or the Ski World Cup in Sölden. On Twitter, tweets range from 52 to 5,600 and followers from 10 to 6,900. The majority of destinations started their Twitter account in 2008 or 2009, while some others followed later in 2014 and one in 2016.

The presence on various social media channels demonstrates the high relevance of social media for marketing of tourism DMOs within the Tyrol. Likewise, the qualitative research shows the high significance of this new marketing tool for DMOs. 88% of interviewees claim that social media has a high significance within their DMO's marketing activities.

On average, social media managers evaluate their own social media presence with 1.78 (on a scale from 1 = very good to 4 = very bad). Results, however, vary depending on the channel. While the performance of blogs are considered the best (1.48), followed by Facebook (1.58), Instagram (1.71) and WhatsApp (1.75), YouTube (2.03), Twitter (2.44), Google+ (2.46), Tumblr (2.5) and Flickr (2.69) demonstrate a below average performance. Qualitative interviews provide explanations for these results. Most DMOs concentrate sparse personal and financial resources on Facebook and Instagram. Many DMOs do not have the necessary budget, know-how or equipment to make high-quality videos, which can be posted on YouTube. Google+ is a channel, which is used for SEO reasons rather than the initial network idea behind it. Accounts on the networks Tumblr and Flickr often exist without actively participating or posting on them.

Integration of Social Media into the DMO marketing strategy

As already mentioned, the first Tyrolean DMOs started to use social media and create accounts in 2008 and 2009 (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO 7, DMO9). Social media started off as an add-on activity within most DMOs, sometimes within the IT department (DMO1, DMO2), sometimes as part of public relations (DMO 5), sometimes as part of the marketing team (DMO3, DMO4, DMO7, DMO9, DMO12). Most of them started with a Facebook profile, as business sites did not exist at that time (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO7, DMO9). However, a real focus on social media was only set around 2012-2014, when social media became the focus of at least the marketing of bigger DMOs. This also involved the introduction of the first social media manager positions (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO5).

Smaller DMOs still have neither the human and financial resources nor the know-how to efficiently use social media as a marketing tool (DMO8, DMO11, DMO12).

Nowadays, most DMOs (91%) have a social media manager. In reality, these people often only focus a small amount of their work time on social media and have other tasks and online marketing duties to complete. Mostly, only 10-20% of their time is really dedicated to social media (DMO4, DMO5, DMO6, DMO7, DMO8, DMO9, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12). Only two DMOs (DMO 1, DMO2) have installed social media teams of 3-4 full time staff members and are even thinking of employing one more full time person in the near future.

As already described in the theory, most DMOs engage in social media without following a strategic approach but use a process of trial and error as well as learning by doing (DMO5, DMO6, DMO7, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12). Even though 76% of DMOs claim to have some sort of social media strategy in the quantitative survey, qualitative interviews showed that these are mostly just guidelines or directives, not an integrated social media strategy (DMO5, DMO6, DMO7, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12). Two thirds of DMOs have defined guidelines and directives for posts, response times and approvals. However, in 9% such guidelines or directives are missing. Some social media managers claim that they have a strategy in mind (DMO8, DMO10) and three are currently working on formalizing their strategy (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO9).

63% carry out all their activities on social media internally, while 30% work together with marketing agencies and 9% with freelancers (multiple answers). External agencies are accountable mainly for ad campaigns and content management. 60% have installed editorial schedules and hold regular team meetings. 76% of DMOs offer or foster further education for their employees in the field of social media. These include internal workshops as well as participating in fairs and conferences and meetings with external agencies.

Challenges for DMOs

Even though DMOs have recognized the high importance of social media for their destination marketing (88% high significance), the reality - especially in smaller organizations - presents a different picture. Social media often receives insufficient attention (DMO 8, DMO11, DMO 12) as other tasks have higher priority. The biggest challenge seems to be resources, both human and financial. As already shown, only two DMOs have a real online marekting team. In most other cases, 1 to 2 staff members are taking over social media as part of their work in online marketing, but do not have enough resources for strategic issues, for content production on various channels, monitoring or reacting to interactions in time (DMO4, DMO5, DMO6, DMO7, DMO8, DMO9, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12). Interviewees also mention financial restrains as a burden (DMO4, DMO6, DMO7, DMO8, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12).

Social media managers affirm that they are using most of their time for content management (1.81) followed by conception & strategy (2.56), customer contact (2.72), technical issues (3.72) and monitoring (3.91) (scale 1=highest time exposure, 5=lowest time exposure). Producing good content also proved to be a big challenge within qualitative interviews

(DMO2, DMO5, DMO9, DMO11, DMO12). However, good content does not always mean high-quality pictures or well-investigated articles. Often, snapshots and background stories are more appreciated by users (DMO1, DMO9). Social media managers are aware that videos are the future of social media marketing, but they are lacking human as well as financial resources in order to produce good video content (DMO6, DMO9, DMO10, DMO11). DMO1 is planning to install a new position for a video social media editor in 2018. Furthermore, it is a challenge to produce good content in low season (DMO10) as well as channel-specific content (DMO9, DMO11). Some DMOs are concerned about the fact that achieving visibility and online coverage on Facebook becomes more and more difficult. They are concerned that the focus of Facebook will be more and more on paid ads in the near future (DMO7, DMO10).

Mangold & Faulds (2009, p. 358) claim that *"many managers lack a full appreciation for social media's role in the company's promotional efforts."* This also seems to be the case in Tyrolean DMOs. 5 DMOs claim that the internal awareness for social media within the management board is missing (DMO3, DMO4, DMO6, DMO7, DMO12). Only 3 DMOs seem to have the full support from the management board. In these cases, social media is an integral part of the marketing strategy and therefore part of any marketing activity of the DMO (DMO1, DMO2, DMO9).

Another challenge arises from the cooperation with stakeholders within the destination. Only 24% of respondents from the quantitative survey claim that there is a good cooperation, further 42% affirm that there is some kind of cooperation. 30% however confirm that there is no cooperation at all. At the same time, 85% of DMOs wish to have a better cooperation with other service providers and stakeholders within as well as outside the destination. They would like to improve the stakeholder communication, develop a joint social media strategy, organize common stakeholder meetings, and help service providers to become more professional when it comes to social media.

The strongest cooperation partners within the destinations are cable-car companies (DMO1, DMO3, DMO6, DMO7, DMO9). Cooperation, at the moment, ranges from sharing posts from other service providers in the region (mainly accomodation or cable-car companies) (DMO6, DMO7, DMO9, DMO10, DMO11) to establishing a coordinated marketing strategy (DMO1, DMO2). In the latter case, DMO2 and the cable-car company share a common online presence (both website and social media channels), content production and budget, hold regular meetings and staff trainings. DMO1 even solves the problem of weekend shifts by letting cash desk staff of the cable-cars answer social media requests on weekends. DMO10 shares a common website with the cable-car company, however has separate social media accounts. DMO9 shares a common online marketing budget with the cable-car company and reconciles their social media presence with them.

Many DMOs claim that their function of representing and marketing the service providers and thus accomodation providers in the region becomes difficult when it comes to social media. As they cannot share posts from all accommodation providers for example, they have to find a balance (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO7, DMO8). However, a newly established position of a so-called host coach within Tyrolean DMOs should function as a link between

the DMO and local hosts. Host coaches get a special training carried out by the host academy. This further education is coordinated by the association of Tyrolean tourism management organitzions (VTT Verband der Tiroler Tourismusverbände). One part of this training also contains online and social media marekting. Host coaches are supposed to transfer their knowledge to accommodation providers in order to push profesionalization within the tourism industry. However, this does not seem to work out so far (DMO4, DMO6, DMO8, DMO10, DMO11). Only few destinations have organized workshops for accommodation providers (DMO1, DMO3, DMO9).

In the quantitative study, only two thirds of DMOs claim to have installed some sort of marketing control systems for their social media activities, which mainly means tracking fans, followers, range or interactions through monitoring tools offered by social media channels. Only two DMOs (DMO1, DMO3) have installed a real monitoring system, including defined performance indicators and integrating results in reformulating the strategy and measures undertaken.

Opportunities for DMOs

All DMOs are present on social media and therefore have perceived it as a crucial part of today's tourism marketing. 61% of DMOs claim that they plan to boost their presence on social media in the future. DMOs consider the direct contact with guests (96%) as well as the quick communication of content (88%) as the main opportunities of social media for their marketing. Further opportunities include the fact that social media is a rather cost-effective marketing channel and offers proximity to customers (73% each). Interviewees further value the active recommendation through social media and the possibility to acquire new potential target groups (55% each). In order to increase the number of users, 94% of the DMOs interviewed try to integrate social media channels in their website, 88% run ad campaigns, 79% try to deliver creative content, 76% run sweepstakes, 70% AdWords campaigns and 42% include social media into offline communication. Further 18% also use it for surveys.

Making use of CGC for their tourism marketing has been recognized by some DMOs, but yet not at a sufficient level (DMO5, DMO7, DMO8). Two DMOs claim that they want to integrate local residents for content production as well as other third parties (DMO5, DMO11). Local residents are not just important users of the destination’s social media channels (DMO6, DMO7, DMO11, DMO12), they are sometimes actively integrated and write blog posts or provide social media managers with pictures or videos from the region (DMO4, DMO7, DMO12). DMOs have furthermore actively started to work with influencers for content production (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO4, DMO6, DMO9, DMO10).

Only few DMOs use their network and cooperate with other DMOs for either joint marketing (DMO5, DMO7) or benchmarking (DMO1, DMO2). Some informal contacts exist between social media managers as loose networks (DMO3, DMO4, DMO7, DMO8, DMO10, DMO11). Some DMOs cooperate with the Tirol Werbung as the subordinate regional tourism organization of the province. They either share content of the Tirol Werbung (DMO12) and provide them with their own content (DMO4, DMO9, DMO12) or participate in meetings or trainings (DMO1, DMO3). While some Tyrol-wide networks exist for other special topics

like geo-data (DMO4, DMO5), a network for online marketing once existed, however has not been active for a while (DMO1, DMO2, DMO3, DMO9). More than 90% confirm that they would appreciate a stronger interaction and exchange with Tirol Werbung. This was also explicitly mentioned during qualitative interviews (DMO3, DMO4, DMO5, DMO9, DMO11). 88% would like to foster the cooperation between social media managers of DMOs.

Negative feedback does not seem to be a big problem on social media. Most DMOs have not experienced a firestorm on their social media channels so far (DMO2, DMO3, DMO6, DMO7, DMO9, DMO10, DMO11, DMO12). Only two DMOs report firestorms within their destination (DMO1, DMO5). Social media managers experience that guests estimate their tourism products and destination and that most comments and feedback is rather positive (DMO3, DMO9, DMO10). One social media manager experienced that negative comments get discredited by other users. Users even apologized when urging them not to use rude expressions. One Facebook fan even wanted to get to know the social media manager, once the fan was in the destination (DMO3). In order to be prepared for negative comments, one DMO has prepared a complain book including guidelines on how to handle them (DMO1). For severe cases – like natural catastrophes – DMOs also have guideline for crisis communication (DMO1, DMO2). One DMO has discussed this topic with their external agency (DMO3), but others do not seem to be prepared for a firestorm.

One DMO's social media manager sums it up by saying that social media is made for tourism destinations to spread their message, their content and brand. He considers social media as an instrument, which plays into the hands of DMOs (DMO2).

3. Conclusion and implications for DMOs

The current study shows the importance of social media for the destination marketing in alpine regions. DMOs have recognized the importance of social media for their marketing. However, they are facing various challenges in their daily, operational implementation of social media as an integral part of marketing. To provide DMOs with necessary knowledge, this study concludes with practical implications for social media marketing managers in DMOs.

First of all, a strategic approach is missing. Many activities follow the approach of learning by doing and gut instincts dominate the decision-making process. This can be mainly attributed to the lack of personal and financial resources for social media activities as well as the missing awareness of the management boards. DMOs should be encouraged to focus on social media marketing from a more strategic point of view. A well formulated marketing strategy, which integrates social media marketing as a crucial role, should be present in every DMO. All the internal stakeholders like cash and information desk staff, marketing managers, the management team and the boards of directors should be included in the strategy formulation process. Furthermore, idea generation and strategy formulation input of the members of all management levels may lead to a more integrative and holistic social media strategy, as operational and strategic issues are considered. As Mangold & Faulds (2009) mention, and the findings of our study prevail, there clearly is a lack of awareness in the top management team. This integrative strategy approach may also foster the internal awareness

and appreciation of social media marketing within the management team and the board of directors.

However, there is strong evidence that it is important to provide DMOs with the necessary human and financial resources in order to professionalize social media marketing. This again comes along with the issue of awareness within the top management level. By regarding social media marketing not only as an operational tool for the promotion of the destination, but more as a strategic tool for market research and brand positioning, financial resources for more workforce in social media marketing could be allocated by the board of directors.

A stronger emphasis has to be put on the education and further training of social media marketing managers in DMOs. Today's world is ever-changing and disruptive, social media marketing managers should therefore be up-to-date with current issues and trends. A relevant factor is consequently the education within universities; they have to integrate online and social media marketing into their curricula to improve social media marketing knowledge and skills of the future generation of social media marketing managers. Furthermore, a new generation of digital natives - born and raised with social media applications - is taking over important functions, both within accommodations as well as in DMOS. The view of social media marketing as solely a "nice-to-have" tool for promotion might change over time.

At the moment, social media is mainly considered as a platform for providing information and interacting with customers. This means that within the customer journey, destinations use social media for the pre-service period for attracting potential guests and providing them with necessary information. In the service-period, once in the destination, guests can access information about activities within the destination, events and opening hours. However, destination in the future should put more focus on social media as a distribution channel, as there is strong evidence, that social networks like Facebook are becoming more and more a sales platform for products and services. Further focus has to be put on marketing control systems and measuring social media activities by establishing KPIs. A critical evaluation of goals reached and KPIs is necessary for a more professional approach to social media marketing in destinations. Furthermore, results from such reports have to build the basis for future strategic decisions.

In addition, DMOs should ensure high quality content with special regard to their target groups. In a first step, it is necessary to evaluate the current target groups on social media. In a second step, relevant platforms and networks should be assessed and selected carefully according to the preferences of the target group. In a third step, DMOs should actively post target- and channel-specific content in form of blogposts, videos or photos. Furthermore, it is relevant that the social media marketing activities do fit with the image of the DMO, as the use of high-professional and highly edited pictures may cause a lack of authenticity and credibility. Another content-related issue that is appreciated by customers is social media marketing activities, which tell a personal story of a destination. The DMO should engage with interesting locals, who are willing to share their particular stories about the region with a viral crowd.

Another major issue of DMOs and their social media activities is the cooperation with and among other stakeholders and tourism providers in the destination. Synergy effects are not exploited at a sufficient level so far. Cooperation within the destinations however is necessary in order to achieve more output in marketing. DMOs should take a leading role in promoting and fostering collaborative work on social networks. This can range from reposting posts and content from several tourism providers or integrating blog articles on the DMO website within the destinations to running only one joint account on one platform together. The DMO and the whole destination as such can thus profit from synergy effects and a bigger viral crowd. In addition, DMOs should act as a mediator between the tourism providers within the region and actively promote cooperative approaches in social media marketing between the different stakeholders.

Tyrolean DMOs are not only lacking cooperation within their destinations and the stakeholders, but also between social media managers from the different Tyrolean DMOs. In order to learn from each other and profit from an internal B2B social network of experts, relevant networking platforms for information exchange have to be established. This is why the tourism department at MCI Management Center Innsbruck as well as the Tirol Werbung are planning to form a network of social media managers within the Tyrol to foster knowledge and know-how exchange within destinations, build up a strong network of personal relationships and better coordinate social media activities in the Tyrol.

4. Limitations and further research

Even though only one Tyrolean DMO did not participate in the current study, correlation or regression analysis did not produce any significant values due to the low sample size. Therefore, the quantitative part is rather descriptive. Regarding the qualitative analysis, it lies in the nature of qualitative interviews that bias during the interviews cannot be excluded. Furthermore, qualitative research highly depends on the domain specific knowledge of the interviewee and their willingness to answer the questions (Malhotra, 2010; Lamnek, 2010).

Another possible weakness of this study lies within the generalization of the results (Lamnek, 2010). This study was conducted within the alpine region of Tyrol, the structure of DMOs in alpine region is special as it is fragmented and community-based and therefore region-specific governing and financial issues have to be considered (Falgestad & Hope, 2004). Due to these inherent characteristics of alpine DMOs, their approach to social media marketing may differ from other DMOs which are more corporate-based and privately financed. Nevertheless, relevant implications regarding content and strategy issues can be derived for the social media marketing in DMOs with a different structure. Further research should focus on other alpine DMOs outside of the Tyrol to compare results, and to show whether structural issues make a difference in social media marketing.

As social media evolves as an important part of destination marketing and DMOs become more professional over time, opportunities and challenges might change over time. Therefore, periodical studies would be interesting. DMOs also should be encouraged to turn the challenges that are created by social media into potential opportunities within social media marketing.

Special issues, such as influencer marketing as a part of destination marketing, require separate consideration. Social media marketing in cooperation with bloggers or influencers seems to be a trend for destinations. Nevertheless, there are special considerations regarding the cooperation with online key influencers, such as authenticity and credibility. Further research should focus on how cooperation with influencers can be effectively used for online and social media marketing of destinations.

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