

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

## Journal of Destination Marketing &amp; Management

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm)

## Destination marketing: The use of technology since the millennium

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Technologies  
Destination marketing organisations  
Co-creation  
Digital channels  
Tourist experiences

## ABSTRACT

This editorial presents an overview of studies contained in this special issue. Recognising that destination management and marketing remains a key field of academic study and as an issue of importance to the tourism industry. The collection of papers in this issue explore the rapid and expansive technological enhancement and innovations in destination management. Whilst not attempting to provide full coverage of emerging technologies, the issue has succeeded in identifying some key issues for future practice and research.

## 1. Introduction

Destination management and marketing remains a key issue as a field of academic study and as an area of importance to the tourism industry. Yet, in recent years, DMOs (destination management organisations; although the term is often used interchangeably with destination management organisations) have seen reduced public sector funding and an increased reliance on generating commercial income to support their core activities (Robinson, Lueck, & Smith, 2013). Over his same period, the impact of technology on the delivery of DMO responsibilities has produced significant opportunities and challenges. Disruptive activities and technologies have forced changes, even revolutions, in the way DMOs engage with their consumers. Over the past twenty years these can be best summarised as the emergence of the internet, the emergence of Web 2.0, the impact of eWOM, increased technological mobilities and, finally the consumer revolution which has witnessed the expansion of non-traditional forms of booking accommodation and travel. Such is the rapid pace of change that this special edition considers - the current technological forces which are shaping contemporary destination management and marketing.

Of particular interest, however, is one key issue which underlies all the papers which are presented in this special edition: the extent to which the role of DMOs and tourism communities increasingly reflect the idea of both co-creation and prosumption (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012). Despite only becoming prevalent in the last two decades, prosumption was first explained by Toffler (1980) as bringing together the processes of production and consumption, an idea first explored by Karl Marx and later by McLuhan and Nevitt (1972). Prosumption was subsequently discussed by Kotler (1986) as 'The Prosumer Movement' and Dabholkar (1990), whilst the related concept

of 'value co-creation' (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008) has been of interest within tourism literature. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) and Ritzer et al. (2012) argue that prosumption has always existed, but has been understood as the separate processes of production and consumption. Xie, Bagozzi, and Troye (2008, p110) define prosumption (within tourism) as 'value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences'. This is consistent with the notion of value co-creation, where tourists also contribute to co-creation through their own performances (Haldrup & Larsen, 2010; Lusch & Vargo, 2006; Rakić & Chambers, 2012). This emerging work can be explored through a range of tourist activities. For example, Robinson (2012) discusses the role of Google Earth in contributing to the development of destination image, feeding into the hermeneutic circle of representation (Jenkins, 2003; Robinson, 2012) that informs and constructs destination images. This presumption of images and representations of first-hand visual experiences supports the network of resources that facilitate the tourist gaze in the first place, including transport and accommodation. Yet such images only provide information about what it is the visitor might see: in much the same way that TripAdvisor tells visitors about what they might experience. Further, as Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) observed the consumer is fully engaged in the production of Google Earth content, adding their own photographs, 3D buildings and Wikipedia content, thus demonstrating the role of prosumption (and wikinomics) in travel experiences. Of even greater significance is the way in which such open access and image sharing opens up a more democratic construction of tourist spaces. Emerging technologies of augmented reality, multi-sensory experiences and enhanced technological functionality and design further enhance opportunities for prosumption and are all explored in this special

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Received 24 April 2017; Accepted 25 April 2017

2212-571X/ © 2017 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

edition. Indeed, [Ritzer et al. \(2012\)](#) suggested that it would be online spaces which enabled prosumption to become fully embedded in producer/consumer relationships.

This first discussion acts as a preface to the subsequent papers, exploring the context from which this special issue has developed. The paper provides a quantitative analysis of the content and topics discussed in the context of DMOs and technology over the last 17 years, providing a fascinating and valuable insight into the changing nature of both DMO practice and research in the field.

## 2. Setting the scene

Technological innovations have a long history of facilitating the development of tourism ([Hjalager, 2015](#)). Whilst tourism scholars started to recognise the key role of technology in tourism since the 1970s ([Buhalis & Law, 2008](#); [Pike, 2002](#); [Poon, 1993](#); [Sheldon, 1997](#)), it is argued that it is since the late 1990s, and certainly since 2000, technology has revolutionised the information distribution and communication channels within the tourism sector. As [Zins \(2007\)](#) concludes, web-based materials are the most prominent information source to travel planners. This is, to some extent, reflected in the existing research reviews which have been carried out ([Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2009](#)). [Buhalis and Law \(2008\)](#) reviewed progress in information technology and tourism over a ten year period, and more recently [Standing, Tang-Taye, and Boyer \(2014\)](#) reviewed the impact of the internet on travel and tourism between 2000 and 2010. This resonates with the content analysis of [Leung, Au, and Law \(2015\)](#) where e-marketing is found to be one of the three most popular research topics since the millennium in the *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*.

During this time period, numerous authors have commented on the profound impact of the internet ([Benson, 2008](#); [Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012](#); [Wareham, Zheng, & Straub, 2005](#); [Wirtz, Schilke, & Ullrich, 2010](#); [Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014](#)), and it could be argued that whilst much of this research was enquiring of the impact of technology ([Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014](#)), the increased proliferation of papers discussing technological aspects of travel and tourism is equally driven by the fast pace of change in the sector ([Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2012](#); [Yovcheva, Buhalis, Gatzidis, & van Elzakker, 2014](#)). At the start of the millennium, the sector was looking to the production of websites as a key marketing tool ([Baggio, 2003](#); [Douglas & Mills, 2005](#); [So & Morrison, 2004](#)), but the following ten years saw a pace of change which was not predicted in the early years of the 21st Century. One of the key findings in [Standing et al. \(2014\)](#) was the degree to which the impact of the internet was underestimated during this period of time. [Leung and Law \(2007\)](#) particularly call for further research on the use of technology in destination marketing.

Whilst there have been meta-analyses of literature on the subject of technology and its impact on travel and tourism ([Buhalis & Law, 2008](#); [Law, Buhalis, & Cobanoglu, 2014](#); [Standing et al., 2014](#)), these reviews have been broad in their focus, with little attention placed specifically upon the impact of technology within destinations and destination marketing. In fact, [Lew and Duval \(2008\)](#) summarise that the work of [Alderman and Good \(1997\)](#) on the southern States in the US is one of the earliest online destination marketing research at the time when there were only 50 million internet users worldwide. Nowadays, destinations rely heavily on online marketing communication, and subsequently communication technologies ([Davidson & Keup, 2014](#); [Stienmetz, Levy, & Boo, 2013](#)). DMOs have undergone major changes in the way they work, and especially so in the last 15 years ([Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O'Leary, 2006](#); [Sheehan, Vargas-Sánchez, Presenza, & Abbate, 2016](#)). [Pike \(2002\)](#) produced a well-cited analysis of destination management literature by which he reviewed 142 papers on destination management between 1973 and 2000 to provide a 'useful reference guide' and a useful insight at the time into the evolution, development and then contemporary state of destination management. It should be noted that these 142 papers were methodo-

logically selected and were not the sum-total of all papers on the subject. Similarly, [Buhalis and Law \(2008\)](#) identify two key limitations: one is their focus only on tourism journals and the method by which they classified the data. Their paper recommends extensions of the study, both longitudinally and in terms of breadth.

Thus, this paper reviews academic discussions surrounding the use of technology on destination marketing since the millennium. As a consequence of the analysis, the study is able to identify progression within this field of research, changing and emerging themes which direct future research and an overview of the impact and influence of technology upon destination management during a key period of technological innovation. As a result, the paper identifies and explores the key changes in academic research, from early studies of the impact of the internet through to contemporary research around Web 2.0, virtual reality and augmented reality, as well as the impacts of technology on the management and marketing of destinations.

## 3. Defining destination management

[Pühringer and Taylor \(2008\)](#) note that DMOs are complex and diverse organisations. The roles of DMOs have various dimensions as they are public facing as marketing organisations ([Pike & Page, 2014](#)), industry facing in terms of product development, quality, and destination brand development ([Bregoli, 2013](#); [Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014](#)), as well as adopting a lobbying and research role ([Laesser & Beritelli, 2013](#); [Pike, 2016](#)). Such organisations usually manage the 'official' destination websites ([Del Vasto-Terrientes, Fernández-Cavia, Huertas, Moreno, & Valls, 2015](#)), underpin database driven destination management system ([Énalán & Soteriades, 2012](#)), and develop strategic analysis through big data ([Fuchs, Höpken, & Lexhagen, 2014](#)). Destination management is further defined by [Vernon, Essex, Pinder, and Curry \(2005\)](#) as a 'collective effort that requires various organisations and businesses in a geographically limited area to harmoniously work together to achieve a common goal'. They play a key role in marketing, management, planning, and are relied heavily on engagement with stakeholders ([Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010](#); [D'Angella, 2007](#)).

The internet has evolved tremendously since the millennium. Web 2.0 has enabled websites to facilitate user generated content which are widely used by online travellers' ([Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013](#); [Shakeela & Weaver, 2012](#)). These user generated content sites, together with image sharing websites ([Hanan & Putit, 2013](#)), Google Earth ([Robinson, 2012](#)), and review websites such as [Tripadvisor.com](#) ([Miguéns, Baggio, & Costa, 2008](#)), have become widespread. This technological revolution has increasingly ceased the market failures in information production and dissemination ([Reinhold, Laesser, & Beritelli, 2015](#)). As a result, the conventional function of DMOs being an 'information source with authority' has been undermined somewhat by the emergence of these new communication tools ([Gretzel, 2006](#); [Hays et al., 2013](#); [Rand, 2006](#)). Further, the development of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) has created opportunities for tourism scholars to develop new perspectives regarding the places and the spaces at destinations ([Lau & McKercher, 2006](#); [Shoval, McKercher, Ng, & Birenboim, 2011](#)), as well as for DMOs to promote targeted tourism services or to enhance visitor experience with augmented reality technology ([Pedrana, 2014](#)). As [von Bergner and Lohmann \(2014\)](#) conclude, technology is one of the most prominent future challenges to destinations as DMOs need to 'adapt their marketing strategies, tactics and initiatives to the development and diffusion of new communication and information technologies in order to follow consumer preferences'.

[Standing et al. \(2014\)](#) identify that the period from 2000 to 2010 "covers the development of internet and tourism research over a significant period and is extensive enough to identify the emergence of literature on a range of research themes within the domain", thus by definition, any significant destination specific research will have taken place during and since this period of time, and not before it. [Buhalis and](#)

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