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## The Role of Information Technology in Promoting a Tourist Destination

Yulia Pshenichnykh <sup>a, \*</sup>, Irina Novi <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Southern Federal University, Russian Federation

<sup>b</sup> Taganrog Institute of Management and Economics, Russian Federation

### Abstract

The image of a tourist destination is an important factor in the development of tourism in the territory. At the same time, it is obvious that promoting a tourist destination on the internet is the most promising and effective way, since the internet possesses a huge number of different tools to shape an image. The spread of the internet and digital media gave people unlimited access to information. These information sources, such as internet portals of various authorities and institutions, including the profiles of these organizations on social networks. Additionally, travel blogs began to play an important role in marketing tourist destinations. The rise of video platforms such as YouTube and TikTok has led to the rise of user-generated content (UGC). The UGC contained in travel blogs have become convenient and important reference materials for tourists, both before and during travel. However, at present, studies on the role of internet resources play in promoting the tourism to specific territories are few. This present study defines the role of internet resources, namely official tourist portals, as a source of information about tourist destinations, as well as the potential for their use as a means of promoting a territory and shaping the image of a tourist destination. Information resources on the Internet were studied, positioning the Rostov region as a tourist destination, as well as communities on social networks. It was found that there are problems in the promotion of information resources of the Rostov region. Recommendations have been proposed to improve the image of the tourist territory in the digital media environment.

**Keywords:** tourism, information technology, tourism destitution, marketing, promotion.

### 1. Introduction

The significant development of information technology and the increase in the number of social networks influenced not only how people communicate and share information (Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2021), but also attracted the attention of researchers and marketers who noticed the internet's ability to influence consumer purchasing decisions (Banyai, Glover, 2010; Byundyugova et al., 2021). One of the fields that was most active in the introduction of digital technologies is tourism services. The tourism and hospitality industry has developed at a rapid pace in recent decades, remaining one of the most attractive sectors of the economy (Pshenichnykh, Novi, 2023). The internet has become an important part of the travel market and a major channel for information retrieval as well as travel planning (Statista, 2023).

In tourism research, internet sources of information are of particular interest. They are key elements in the formation of the image of a destination (Garcia-Haro, 2021). Websites and social media currently play an important role in the tourism industry, as tourists use these platforms to share online content related to their trips. Companies and government authorities use them as a marketing tool, offering holiday destinations and advertising travel products (Statista, 2023a).

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [pshenichnih.julia@gmail.com](mailto:pshenichnih.julia@gmail.com) (Y.A. Pshenichnykh)

The Internet has a significant impact on the tourism industry, acting on the one hand as a platform for transactions, facilitating them, and on the other, important sources of information about tourism products and services, including directly from other consumers (Pan et al, 2007).

Previously, private companies and public authorities used traditional means of promotion in marketing strategies to form and promote a positive image of a territory. At the same time, the rapid growth of digital technologies, including in the media environment, changed this paradigm (Ghazali, Cai, 2013), making the process multi-directional and interactive (Petrenko et al., 2019; Zeng, Gerritsen, 2014).

Meanwhile, an analysis of research on the topic shows that the influence of internet resources on the development of tourism and defining a territory's image in relation to its promotion remains a little studied area. And although the image of the territories is paid quite a lot of attention in works devoted to how to market to territories in general in order to increase their competitiveness, including marketing urban areas (Anholt, 2008; Kotler, 2008), and the narrower field of marketing to tourist destinations (Morrison, 2019; Soteriades, 2020), not many works are devoted to the formation of the image of the tourist territory through internet resources (Ruiz-Real, 2020). The existing literature considers only certain aspects of shaping the attractiveness of tourist destinations through internet resources and social networks. It focuses particularly on the influence of the internet and social networks on tourist destination choices (Ghada, 2021) on the basis of content contained in travel blogs related to the destination's image, mainly from the point of view of the territory itself (climate, transport, cuisine, attractions, etc.) (Chen et al., 2022) and tourist behavior (Abbasi, 2022; Del Chiappa, 2011), determining the potential of travel blogging, video blogs in the marketing of tourist destinations (Iorio, 2022; Peralta, 2019). This is partly due to the relative novelty of the studied phenomenon. Therefore, there is a need for further study on the role of user generated internet resources, since they have the objective potential to work as a full-fledged marketing promotion tool, which includes the ability to optimize the utility of a tourist territory's full potential for the tourist.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to identify the role of portals of official tourist sites as a source of information when choosing a trip and their influence on the formation of the image of a tourist destination, as well as on the promotion of the territory as a tourist product. The results of the analysis can be successfully used in the development of a strategy for marketing management of regional tourism using internet resources (Bogdanova et al., 2017; Novi, 2017).

## 2. Materials and methods

The study includes identifying relevant regional platforms and their communities on social networks, describing the internet resources, synthesizing a set of indicators to assess the competitiveness of selected web pages and communities, measuring their effectiveness (Ferreira et al., 2019). The selected set of indicators allows you to assess the work of the considered digital resources representing the tourist area in the digital environment and identify pain points to be improved upon. The data was collected for three tourist platforms and three social networks: "Vkontakte", "Odnoklassniki" and "Telegram".

As a hypothesis, it was suggested that the tourist flow and income from tourist activities relate to the activities of authorities on the internet, through the placement of content on tourist portals and social networks. Assessment of this connection was carried out based on indicators of the effectiveness of the tourist image of the territory.

Efficiency is the ratio of the results of marketing activities to the resources spent. The effectiveness of creating a positive and recognizable image of the territory as a tool to increase tourist attractiveness is evaluated in different ways (Morse et al., 2007). The effectiveness of the image of the territory can be divided into three types (social, communicative, and economic), each of which is assessed by its own indicators. For the study, the author used:

- social efficiency – the number of people employed in tourism;
- communicative efficiency – territory recognition, rating;
- economic efficiency – cash receipts from inbound tourism, the ratio of the results obtained to the resources spent.

The importance of this study is that tourism occupies a significant role in the economic and social development of the Rostov region. In connection with this, an assessment of the effectiveness of the strategy for promoting the region as a tourist product on the internet through tourist portals and social networks is required.

### 3. Discussion

Most studies in the modern literature that involve developed countries focus on the broad impact of information and communication technologies on travel (Sinha, Gupta, 2023). At the same time, the image of the destination (Ruiz-Real, 2020) has also become an important area of research, and internet sources of information are an important tool for its formation and a way to promote the territory (Alcázar, Sicilia, 2015). In recent years, the image of the destination that tourists perceive has radically changed due to the spread of online sources of information (Foroudi et al., 2020).

The importance of digital marketing is also undeniable for DMO (Soteriades, 2020). These organizations also make extensive use of ICT in their activities. DMO's six major components of digital marketing are content creation, websites, search and optimization, social media, applications, and email marketing (Kotler, 2010). At the same time, Internet portals and social networks have become the main tool for information dissemination and digital marketing for DMO (Wang, 2016).

The main purpose of marketing activities carried out by the DMO is to increase and maintain tourist flows in the destination (Morrison, 2019). The researchers' results demonstrate the direct positive impact of online sources on various aspects of the tourism image (Garcia-Haro, 2021). Travel destinations and products are better advertised online than through traditional means (Fyall et al., 2009). At the same time, several studies argue that traditional and online media are equally competitive in promoting tourism. Traditional media are still effective in promoting tourism in the digital age, especially in the domestic market (Chiguvu, 2022).

The Rostov region has significant recreational potential, rich natural and cultural tourist resources, which attract many vacationers annually. The growing importance of various forms of tourism activities in the region has led to an increase in the number of arrivals to 2.1 million people in 2022. The tourism industry is reflected in many aspects of the socio-economic life of the region.

Great attention is paid to the promotion of the Rostov region as a tourist area. By order of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Rostov region in 2018, a marketing strategy for the tourist attractiveness of the Rostov region was developed. The brand is based on a sign consisting of a laconic symbol in the form of a horse and the phrase "Volny Don" which during its existence has managed to become the marketing framework of the region. The color palette of the image is quite bright and wide and varies from yellow to various shades of blue, red and green.

In 2019, the Ministry of Economic Development of the Rostov region established the Autonomous Non-Profit Organization "Agency for Tourism and Business Communications of the Rostov region". The agency's specialists take part in various international and Russian tourist exhibitions and fairs: the international festival of promotion technologies ProMediaTech, the Russian tourist prize "Russian Travel Awards", the workshop "Be in Russia", "MICE Russia is Next to you!", "Delicious MICE!", international tourism exhibition "Intourmarket", Moscow international tourism exhibition "MITT", etc.

Advertising and information materials and souvenirs were developed: booklets, notebooks, pens, bags, magnets, thermos circles, wooden souvenirs, mini-guides, tourist maps, throws, etc.

Materials about the tourist potential of the Rostov region are posted on federal and regional websites of the media, such as the "Arguments and Facts" publications, the "Rostov News Agency", the "Rest in Russia" project, the "Komsomolskaya Pravda" publication, "Russian Traveler", etc.

To develop transit road tourism, outdoor advertising of the tourist attractiveness of the Rostov region is placed on billboards along federal and regional highways, at gas stations of the M-4 Don highway.

Unconventional ways of promoting the brand of the region are also used, for example, branding the CV-cars of the Premium Russian Railways branded train, and previously the Azimut airline.

Information tours also contribute to the promotion of a tourist destination: "On the way to the South", "Taganrog. Reboot", "Startup of Peter the Great", "Run rampant on the Upper Don". A regional calendar of events is formed annually. It is used by regional tour operators in the development of a tourist product. In 2022, the Don Ear gastronomic festival and the Umbrella Morning festival were held.

Under special orders from state authorities, videos about the region are being created that are not shown on federal channels. In 2021, a commercial was shot about the tourist attractiveness

of the Rostov region “Rostov region. Crossing any borders” and the video “Big Cossack Circle” which won prizes at international competitions.

The Internet plays an effective role in promoting the tourist product of the Rostov region, which has now become the main means for tourists to find any kind of information but is also of undoubted interest to tourist enterprises and authorities. Supporting and promoting regional electronic resources (tourism websites and portals) is today one of the most common and effective ways to promote a regional tourism product. In general, information resources on the Internet, which in one way or another contribute to the tourist development of the Rostov region, can be conditionally divided into four groups:

- *official resources*. This group includes sites or portals created by various bodies or institutions (for example, the official portal of the Government of the Rostov Region; official tourism portal of the Rostov region; the official portal of the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Rostov Region; official tourist portals of the city of Rostov-on-Don, the city of Taganrog and other territories of the region);

- *resources of tourism organizations*. This group includes sites and portals of museums, reserves, travel agencies and other participants in the tourist sphere (for example, the website of the Taganrog State Literary and Historical and Architectural Museum-Reserve; site of the People's Military-Historical Museum Complex of the Great Patriotic War “Sambek Heights”; website of the Rostov State Natural Biosphere Reserve; website of the regional tourism agency Rostov-Tur LLC, etc.);

- *support resources*. This group includes unofficial sites and portals that inform and help tourists (for example, the educational portal about the Don region “Don Dawns”; information resource “Subtleties of Tourism” section of the Rostov Region; articles and notes on the Profi.travel website. Tells general information about the region, justifies the reasons for visiting it, gives information on cities and attractions);

- *social networks*. This group includes various profiles in the most popular social networks, which in one way or another advertise, promote tourism in the Rostov region or give any information about it.

The presented experience shows that considering technological changes, the structure of the advertising tools used in the formation and promotion of the image of the region is constantly changing and there is a need for further research considering the unique nature of the tourism sector.

#### 4. Results

Portals about tourism in the Rostov region are an important tool for tourists who want information about the sights of the region, as well as for businesses that are engaged in tourism and want to promote their product. In this regard, an analysis was carried out of the main tourist portals of the Rostov region, which position the region as a tourist product (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Assessment of popular information resources about the Rostov region

Criterion / Resource	Interface	Navigation	Information architecture	Interactivity	Internationality	Promotion
“Volny Don” (“VisitDon”)	Highly attractive, combination of all elements, corporate colors and logo	Availability of clickable links and sections	Various illustrations, effective system of headings	Keyword search, interactive	International, information available in 7 languages	Lack of proper promotion
Tourism and Business Communications Agency	Highly attractive, combination of all elements,	Availability of clickable links and sections	Various illustrations, effective system of	Keyword search, interactive	Not international	Lack of proper promotion

	corporate colors and logo		headings			
Don tourism	Low attractiveness, lack of corporate colors	Lack of clickable links, sections	Lack of navigation, lack of categories	Keyword search, interactive	Not international	Lack of proper promotion

The comparative characteristic of the presented sites allows us to conclude that the most competitive, interesting and important in terms of promoting the Rostov region as a tourist territory is the official tourism portal “VisitDon” which promotes the regional tourism brand “Volny Don” The site is made in the brand's corporate colors, the main symbol of which is a red horse. First, the high rating of the site is associated with its greatest information content. The portal contains the main sections that reveal extensive information about tourism in the Rostov region (about the region, what to do, where to eat, where to stay, routes, event calendar). There is also a separate menu that allows a tourist to get useful information about visa centers and travel agencies in the region, access to virtual excursions and an audio guide, and timely get information about events and attractions. In general, the information on the portal is convenient for perception, logically structured, the text is presented accessible, alternates with photographs, maps, symbols, which in general has a positive effect on the formation of the image of the tourist territory. Site navigation is intuitive. The information is presented in seven languages, which is its undoubted advantage, but at the same time it is possible to note the lack of information in eastern languages, such as Chinese, which reduces its attractiveness for tourists from Asian countries.

Assessing the quality of the promotion of information resources, and therefore the promotion of the brand of the tourist territory in the Internet space, it should be noted that there are several problems. When querying search engines, these information resources appear, unfortunately, not in the first place. The index indicator affects the frequency and completeness of the display of sites in search engines. If we pay attention to the traffic of visits, then we can conclude that the portal about tourism “Volny Don” is more visited in comparison with those under consideration. When analyzing information about loading sites, their usability, it should be noted that mobile versions of portals have a low download speed. While in the present days and young people and people of a more mature age are increasingly using mobile devices to find information. The main disadvantage of all three sites is the lack of an interactive map of the area with attractions. On the portal “Volny Don” there is no form of feedback, where the user could share his opinion, ask a question. This method of communication attracts the attention of visitors to the site and can serve as an additional tool for its promotion (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparative analysis of information resources (statistics for August 2023)

Indicators for comparative analysis	Tourism portal “Volny Don” ( <a href="https://visitdon.ru">https://visitdon.ru</a> )	Don tourism ( <a href="https://dontourism.ru">https://dontourism.ru</a> )	Tourism and Business Communications Agency ( <a href="https://art-ro.ru">https://art-ro.ru</a> )
Domain age	4,3 y	1,4 y	3.5 y
Website rating in the Russian Federation (by traffic)	227 825	643 207	737 735
Yandex ICS	240	40	20
Site quality assessment	45/100	80/100	50/100
Indexing	Yandex: 2188 Google: 1480	Yandex: 588 Google: 39	Yandex: 898 Google: 246
Visit traffic (visitors)	540/day 16700/mth	40/day 1100/mth	150/day 4500/mth

Usability (speed of use)	from computer: 1,4 c from mobile: 7,6 c	from computer: 0,8 c from mobile: 2,1 c	from computer: 1,7 c from mobile: 5,6 c
Naturalness of links:			
natural links	80 %	76 %	59 %
SEO	20 %	24 %	41 %
Average visit duration	0,2 min	0,6 min	1 min
Browsing depth (pages per visit)	1	1,23	2
Social activity (followers on social networks)	BK – 5502 OK – 3502 ТГ – 164	-	BK – 204 ТГ – 165

Notes: compiled by the author based on the service a.pr-cy.ru; parsesite.ru; be1.ru

One of the criteria for a good functional state of the site is the level of elaboration of keywords and queries on it, according to which the site can be displayed in Yandex and Google search engines. According to <https://be1.ru> service, the semantic core of the “Volny Don” website is based on words related to the geographical names of attractions, namely, “attractions of Rostov-on-Don” in the Yandex search engine and the “stone staircase” in the Google system. At the same time, the visibility of the portal by the first keywords in the Yandex search engine is higher than in Google (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Keywords of the official portal for tourism of the Rostov region “Volny Don” and their visibility in search engines (August 2023)

Yandex				Google			
keywords	positions	requests per month	eff. impression	keywords	positions	requests per month	eff. impression
Rostov-on-Don attractions	14	1213	121	stone staircase	3	622	622
Rostov-on-Don attractions	15	1213	121	NPI Novocherkassk	9	574	287
Rostov-on-Don attractions	15	1213	121	stone staircase Taganrog	6	318	159
Volgodonsk	30	2302	69	Taganrog	47	5015	150
stone staircase	14	622	62	Veshenskaya	3	136	136
Tsimlyansk reservoir	16	388	39	NPI	9	268	134
sights of Rostov-on-Don	17	275	28	Morskaya	7	251	126
tour operators Rostov-on-Don	8	52	26	M4 Don	20	973	97
Stella Rostov-on-Don	5	36	25	Veshenskaya	5	133	93
what to see in Rostov-on-Don	13	206	21	Vyoshenskaya village	3	72	72

Notes: compiled by the author based on the service parsesite.ru

Thus, to SEO-promote the resource more effectively under consideration, more attention should be paid to the content of the site, and to working with keywords. You can also use different forms of text content, post not only descriptive articles, but also reviews about travel and

attractions, advice from experienced travelers about how to get together on a trip, what places to visit, how much money to take with you.

Interestingly, social networks are not a priority source of traffic. Moreover, in modern practice, they are one of the most common promotion channels. Based on the analysis of the activities of the Weekend on Volny Don community in the social networks “Vkontakte”, “Odnoklassniki” and “Telegram”, the greatest activity of the community in the “Vkontakte” network should be noted. The involvement of ER subscribers and the attractiveness of LR are more characteristic of this network, whose account demonstrates a significant gap from other communities. At the same time, the published content of the networks is almost identical, on average, posts are posted every two days. Basically, the information concerns upcoming events, recommendations where you can relax, draws. From this we can conclude that for the main target audience the social network “VKontakte” is the main source of information about recreation in the Rostov region (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Analysis of the activities of the community “Weekend on Volny Don” in social networks (August 2023)

Number of subscribers	Publications	Likes	Reposts	Comments	Views	ER Day	ER Post	ER View	LR	TR
“VKontakte”										
5502	17	429	75	175	140 601	0,398	0,725	0,482	7,797	3,180
“Odnoklassniki”										
3502	14	71	3	2	-	0,155	0,070	-	2,02	0,085
“Telegram”										
164	15	13	0	1	1358	0,569	0,275	7,926	7,926	0,609

Notes: ER Day – daily engagement rate; ER Post – engagement rate by post; ER View – engagement rate by views; LR – love rate; TR – talk rate.

In addition, the Weekend on Volny Don community has its own YouTube channel with a total of 483 subscribers. However, the content has not been updated for seven months due to the possibility of blocking the platform. It is also worth noting in general the low activity of the channel in terms of the number of views, likes, comments posted earlier by the video (except for the video “Rostov region. Crossing any boundaries”). At the same time, video hosting is a very promising tool for promoting the Rostov region.

In general, it is worth noting that the main goal of creating such Internet resources (tourist portals, communities in social networks of regional authorities) is to form a desire to visit the region for a tourist purpose as the main goal. They do not act as advertising resources and are aimed primarily at creating a positive image of the territory in the eyes of potential tourists.

Assessing the effectiveness of the strategy for promoting the Rostov region, including using Internet resources, one can note positive trends. As a result of the application of the above measures to promote the region, according to statistics, the flow of tourists increased from 1.6 million people in 2019 to 2.1 million people in 2022, and according to the analysis of the MTS Big Data system, up to 4 million people. Cash receipts also have a positive upward trend (36.3 % for the period 2019–2022). As a result of the study, data were obtained that allow us to clearly trace the dynamics of the economic effect of activities to promote the regional product of the Rostov region (Table 5).

Thus, these calculations confirm the fact that regional electronic resources are an effective tool for promoting a regional tourist product. Their competent use will make it possible to form an effective strategy for the development of tourism in the region, to promote a regional tourist product to increase income from tourist activities and tourist flow to the region.

**Table 5.** Assessment of the effectiveness of the promotion strategy of the Rostov region

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022
Share of tourist value added in gross regional product (%)	1,18	0,15	0,15	1,22
Cash receipts from inbound tourism, mil rub	19 305,01	2 571,87	23 800,69	26 310,19
Tourist flow to the Rostov region, mil people	1,6	1,5	1,5	2,1
Territory marketing expenses, mil rub	63,1	32,6	48,6	58,6
Cost per tourist, rub	39,44	21,73	32,40	27,90
Economic efficiency of territory marketing	304,94	77,89	488,73	447,98
Social efficiency (percentage of employees in the tourism sector of the total working population), %	1,9	1,8	1,6	1,6
Communicative efficiency (national tourist rating of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation)	15	17	18	21

#### 4. Conclusion

The study helped to understand the role of Internet resources in promoting the territory's tourist product. Modern tourists pay special attention to Internet sources when searching for information. In this regard, even greater attention should be paid to the representation of regional authorities in the digital space, which represents huge opportunities for the formation and promotion of the tourist product of the territory.

According to the results of the analysis, the activity of tourist portals and communities in social networks is directly proportional to the size of the tourist flow and the region's income from tourist activities. As can be seen from the results of the analysis carried out in the Rostov region, targeted and diverse work is being carried out using information resources to promote the region as a tourist destination. At the same time, the authorities should pay more attention to promoting information resources on the Internet, both in Russian and in foreign languages, to attract foreign tourists to the region.

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