

The Impact of Marketing Information on the Decisions of Nautical Tourists Visiting Eastern Adriatic Region*

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Abstract: The information-seeking process of nautical tourists is essential for their decision-making when choosing a specific destination. Modern destination marketing is constantly changing due to the development of new technologies that are meant to attract and retain nautical tourists. Nautical destination managers use modern communication to build and maintain a better image and develop destinations as brands which can function sustainably even in the times of crisis. This paper examines modern and traditional marketing sources of information about Montenegro and Croatia as nautical tourist destinations. It was revealed that the largest share of the informed tourists had previous experience with a destination or were informed through internet sources. The results confirmed that the internet is increasingly used by the surveyed tourists, i.e., there is an increase in promotion through digital marketing tools in both destinations. The comparison of the trends between 2012 and 2021 indicated three common sources of information in both destinations: previous experience, the internet and the recommendations of friends and relatives. The study is based on cross-tabulation analysis which detects the differences in the method of obtaining information by the tourists whose age, gender and education level varied. The practical implication of this paper is the development of destination marketing in the Eastern Adriatic region. More precisely, the study might help the creators of developmental policies and destination operators to choose appropriate marketing strategies in order to adequately position a destination in the market.

Keywords: Marketing, Promotion, Nautical destination, Information.

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1. Introduction

At the roots of its development, nautical tourism was treated as entertainment for the privileged. Similarly, this particular form of tourism is still primarily available to specific categories of tourists with higher incomes. The last decade has evidenced an increase in the production of big nautical vessels - mega and super yachts. World records have often been broken in terms of yacht lengths, heights (the number of hulls), luxurious interiors, additional equipment and sailing performances. Nautical tourists are usually agile, ecologically responsible and tend to spend significantly more money on their vacations than average tourists [1].

The significance of the research is based on the fact that on the one hand, the search for information allows tourists to reduce the level of uncertainty and improve the quality of their trips, while on the other hand, from the offer holder's perspective, understanding the way the tourists get information is essential for marketing management decisions [2]. For that reason marketing research represents a fundamental activity of the creators of developmental policies that affects not only the image of a destination, but also the decisions of tourists when it comes to the choice of a destination.

In nautical tourism, word-of-mouth promotion, including the new form of eWOM, still has a significant impact in the overall information provision. On the contrary, traditional promotion tools more often represent only the initial step leading to digital platforms in the process of information gathering about a destination. Growing trends and the comprehensive presence of internet communication technologies in the process of defining sailing routes and choosing the final destination do not reduce the importance of the use of digital platforms during and after the stay at a destination.

The eastern Adriatic coast has a huge potential for the development of nautical tourism due to natural beauty as well as cultural and historical Mediterranean heritage. Croatia is a member of the EU and a state with a well-defined strategy for the development of nautical tourism. Since 2001, the Institute of Tourism in Zagreb has been following the characteristics of nautical demand through the research known as TOMAS Nautika [3]. Evident trends of this developing market motivate further activities of decision-makers and operators in marina business in Croatia. On the contrary, Montenegro still lacks the strategic documentation regarding nautical tourism that could define marketing policies of Montenegro as a destination.

Montenegro, although a country with a particularly long and internationally recognized maritime tradition, has only recorded a more notable development of nautical tourism capacities in the last fifteen years. Namely, from the moment of signing the contract on changing the purpose

of the former military shipyard in Tivat into a modern marina with accompanying facilities, the expansion of the construction of reception facilities for nautical tourists on this part of the Adriatic coast begins. Retrospectively, the development of modern Montenegrin nautical tourism started only in 2007. Before that, the offer was only the Bar marina, which was never fully completed, and a certain number of customized moorings in the communal ports of Budva, Kotor, and Herceg Novi. Today, that offer has been improved with four new modern marinas with a capacity of over 1000 berths. New Montenegrin marinas win the most prestigious international awards regarding the quality and category of services they provide. TYHA - The Yacht Harbor Association, as part of the Gold Anchor program, checks the quality of services in marinas through various procedures (self-assessment and expert assessment), all to obtain a category certificate (which can have from 2 to 5 so-called gold anchors), rated Montenegrin marinas Porto Montenegro Tivat and Porto Novi Kumbor with a maximum of 5 gold anchors. Marina Porto Montenegro is the first superyacht marina in the world to be awarded the "Clean Marina" accreditation, also by TYHA [4]. This Montenegrin marina, along with marinas in the most prestigious destinations, such as Monaco, Capri, and Dubai, is ranked in the top 10 marinas in the world [5].

In addition to the visible improvement in the scope and quality of Montenegrin nautical tourism ports (marinas) on the ground, statistical indicators also confirm the development trends in question. In the period from 2007 to 2019, the number of foreign vessels intended for sport and leisure which sailed into Montenegrin territorial waters increased by more than 100% from 2145 to 4775, while the number of nautical tourists on those vessels in the observed period increased by more than of three times, from 9145 to 28562. The global crisis of 2020, caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, led to a sharp drop in the previous indicators; the number of vessels decreased by 61% to 1858, while the number of tourists on those vessels decreased by 74% to 7458. Quick recovery of the indicators followed already in 2021 when the arrival of 4176 vessels and 25123 nautical tourists on them was recorded [6-8]. Compared to the results achieved in the entire destination tourism industry, the decline caused by the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in nautical yachting tourism was significantly smaller. In contrast to 71% in the nautical sector, the drop in the total number of tourist arrivals in Montenegro in 2020 compared to 2019 was slightly higher than 83% [9].

The considerable increase in the number of visitors, concerning the double growth in the number of vessels, among other things, indicates an increase in the size and capacity of these vessels. In other words, the

increasing presence of the so-called mega and super yachts and the elite segment of tourist demand. Compared to tourism in general, the smaller decline during the Covid-19 crisis indicates that Montenegro has successfully developed one of the selective forms of tourism that are more stable, i.e., less sensitive to external effects than tourism in general.

Therefore, the main motive for this research is the detection of differences between Montenegro and neighbouring Croatia in terms of information provision for the tourists. In that sense, the study investigates the following research question “In what ways do tourists obtain information about a particular destination?” The corresponding field research included 609 nautical tourists at the locations along Montenegrin coast between August and September 2021.

Based on the previous findings, the study initially assumes that the tourists visiting Montenegro and Croatia obtain information in a similar way, which means that the increased presence of the internet in marketing strategies should be common for both destinations. Finally, the research hypothesizes that: Despite the growth of the importance of the internet in information provision for nautical tourists, the information based on previous experience still has a dominant influence on the tourists who choose the destinations in the Eastern Adriatic.

The increased competitiveness of nautical tourism industry requires the profound understanding of market demand as well as destination management [10]. However, as a nautical tourism destination, Montenegro still needs to adopt strategic documents in this field. Developmental policies are mainly created by individual stakeholders without consideration of the importance of destination product integration. Clearly defined tourist policies determine the developmental path for a given destination and create a place which tourists will desire in the future [11].

In that sense the study aims to:

- research the basic characteristics of the demand in nautical tourism in the Eastern Adriatic;
- compare the ways the tourists obtain information about Montenegro and Croatia when selecting them as destinations;
- detect the dominant ways of information provision for the tourists visiting these neighbouring countries in order to define marketing communication and rationally invest in the information channels that are available and transparent for the majority of tourists.

A practical contribution of the paper would be the creation of tourism policies and planning documents concerning the marketing management of the destinations as nautical tourism products.

2. Literature review

Most of the studies in the field of nautical tourism have focused on the impact of yachting on the living environment, while the issue of marketing needs to be addressed more [12]. Due to the marked fragmentation and geographical dispersion, sailors represent a demanding demand segment in traditional mass communication tools [13]. Information sources for tourism activities have significantly changed over the past twenty years, mainly due to the impact of new technologies [14]. Several studies have focused on the relationship between information sources and destination selection [15]. Also, many studies examined the information sources for decision-making [16]. Destination image has been recognized as a significant factor influencing destination choice, and many contemporary studies confirm the importance of social media [14].

From the beginning of the development of computer reservation systems CRS in the 1960s, through the development of global distribution systems GDS in the 1980s and the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s, information technologies, as opportunities but also as challenges, have had a dramatic impact on changes in the travel industry [17]. Improving the design and physical availability of portable - mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, along with the application of modern software that connects these devices to the vessel's control systems, brings a high degree of digitalization to all aspects of the destination offers. A large number of commercial and free mobile applications on Google Play, App Store, and related platforms help nautical tourists in activities such as finding and reserving berths in marinas or commercial anchorages, then places in restaurants, delivery - catering of food up to seeing regularly updated weather forecast and sea depth on navigation routes.

On the other hand, there are still many websites on the side of destination nautical tourism offers that could be more visible on search engines, with support for mobile Android and iOS operating systems, outdated information, and appropriate translation of content into foreign languages.

The use of the internet in the information provision for nautical tourists shows an increasing tendency. Internet technologies are used in the pre-consumption phase to obtain the information needed for travel planning, evaluation, and comparison, formulate clear expectations to choose between alternatives and continue communication with the offer holders to ensure the preparation and/or execution of the purchase transaction. In the course of consumption, the role of the Internet is related mainly to obtaining more detailed information about a place at a given moment. While in the post-consumption phase, internet technologies are used to share, document, and

revive tourist experiences through online announcements and establish/maintain communication with representatives of visited places and attractions in the context of preparing future arrangements [18]. There are several methods of the wider utilization of the internet in information provision by means of websites, mobile applications, social networks and specialized groups [18].

The former word-of-mouth communication among boaters is now gaining expanded meaning and action through so-called "eWOM" (electronic word-of-mouth) and the impact it has on attitudes, perceptions, intentions, and choices of future sailing routes and destinations [17].

Traditional sources of information still represent official resources and the basis for decision making regarding the choice and image of a destination [15]. However, the funds should be carefully invested in traditional information sources with precise observation of the application of information and communication technologies in this specific field of marketing.

3. Materials and methods

There is an observed lack of literature regarding the motives, satisfaction, decision making process and loyalty of the nautical tourists who visit eastern Adriatic countries, especially Montenegro. This study relies on the famous analysis known as cross-tabulation because the research included categorical variables or data, e.g. information about Montenegrin and Croatian groups of nautical tourists who chose these two destinations in different ways.

Generally, the categorical variables represent the input for future studies on the creation of strategic documents in the field of nautical industry and the studies on the definition of general marketing strategies for the unique Adriatic Region. The relationships between the data groups were also separately examined. Namely, secondary research was conducted in order to identify data about Croatian nautical tourists for the period between 2012 and 2017. The primary research concerning Montenegro was subsequently conducted in 2021. The characteristics defined included the age, gender and educational background of the respondents. The answers of the respondents to the research question "In what ways do tourists obtain information about a particular destination?" along with the predefined characteristics were both subjected to cross-tabulation.

This paper examines the most important sources of information for nautical tourists: 1) previous stay experience, 2) the internet, 3) recommendations from relatives or friends, 4) radio, television, film, or

video, 5) tourist fairs and exhibitions, 6) brochures, advertisements, posters, and 7) articles in newspapers or magazines.

Using the example of Montenegro and Croatia, today one of the most wanted nautical tourism destinations globally [19], marketing trends in informing nautical tourists when choosing the Eastern Adriatic destination in 2012, 2017, and 2021 are presented.

As previously stated the initial idea for carrying out this research was derived from the research on the attitudes of nautical tourists in neighbouring Croatia-TOMAS NAUTIKA, conducted by the Zagreb Institute of Tourism from 2001 [3].

4. Results

When it comes to the profile of nautical tourists visiting Montenegro, this research showed the age structure of respondents as follows: 46-60 years (30.5%), 26-35 years (24.1%), 36-45 years (22.7%), and younger than 25 years (4.9%) (Figure 1). Among the respondents, there were significantly more males (74.9%), which is not unique to Montenegro. However, a similar trend was observed in research on the characteristics of nautical tourists in other destinations. The vast majority of respondents graduated from university (79.8%), of which 27.6% have a master's degree, and 4.9% have a Ph.D.

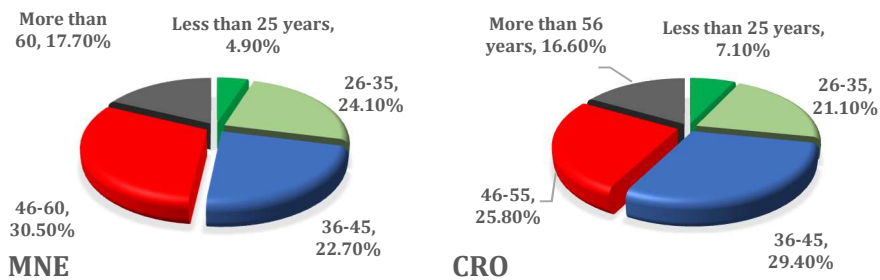


Fig. 1 - Age structure of nautical tourists in Montenegro (2021) and Croatia (2017) [20].

The age structure of nautical tourists in Croatia is like that in Montenegro. More than half are between 26 and 55 years, with the largest category being nautical tourists aged 36 to 45 (29.4%), followed by the age category of 46 to 55 (25.8%). Like in Montenegro, the smallest participation was recorded of the youngest nautical tourists under 25 (7.1%) (Figure 1).

During the research conducted in the Croatian part of the Adriatic in 2017, 50.6% of the respondents had a university education [20].

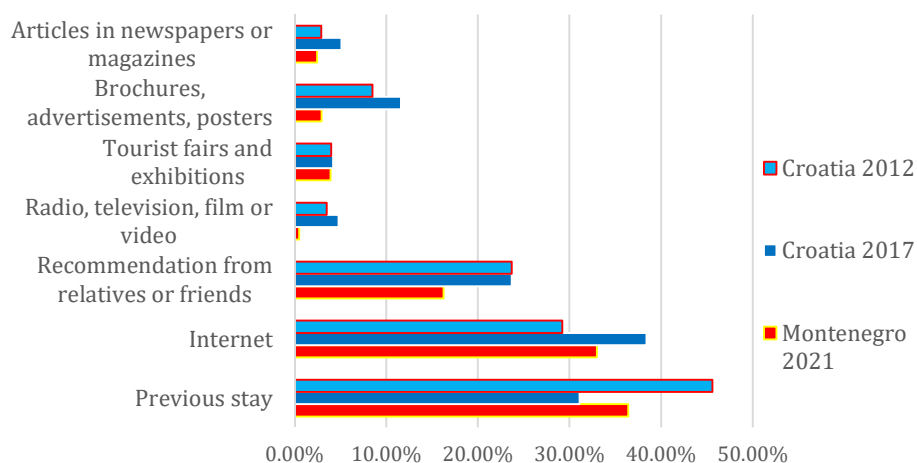


Fig. 2 - Marketing sources of information about nautical destinations Montenegro and Croatia [20, 21].

The results of the survey conducted for Montenegro in 2021 show that the previous stay as a motive for choosing a destination had the largest share in the overall structure of information sources (36.45%). As shown in Figure 2, information about the destination obtained via the Internet had a share of 33%, followed by recommendations from friends and relatives (16.26%). Mainly, tourist fairs and exhibitions, as well as brochures, posters, and articles in newspapers or magazines, were used by less than 5% of nautical tourists visiting Montenegro (Figure 2).

Finally, other sources of information, such as radio, television, film, or videos, have very little influence on respondents in choosing Montenegro as a nautical destination (below 0.5%).

Marketing sources of information in Croatia have been monitored since 2004, while the previous research was done in 2017. Figure 2 shows that in Croatia and Montenegro, there is a growing trend of using the Internet to inform nautical tourists when choosing a destination. Other sources of information also show the same trend of changes during the past ten years.

The results obtained through cross-tabulation indicate that in relation to gender, male participants ranked the previous stay as the main source of

information (39.4%), which was followed by the internet sources (28.2%). For female respondents, the internet had primary importance (43.1%), which was followed by the previous stay (25.4%), recommendations from friends (19.6%) and articles in magazines (3.9%). Interestingly, in the case of male participants the fourth place was occupied by fairs and exhibitions (4.6%).

Table 1 - *The cross-tab analysis of the characteristics of nautical tourists visiting Montenegro and their ways of obtaining information.*

Characteristics of nautical tourists/ Manner of inform.	Gender		Age					Education				
	Male %	Ladies %	Less than 25 years %	26 to 35 years %	36 to 45 years %	46 to 60 years %	More than 60 years %	Elem. school or lower %	High Sch. %	Fac. or Coll. %	Mas. %	PhD %
Previous stay	39.4	25.4	40	38.7	30.4	27.4	52.7	100	47.5	31.2	32.1	50
Internet	28.2	43.1	50	24.4	39.1	35.4	22.2	0	32.5	28.1	44.6	0
Radio, television, film or video	0.0	1.9	0	0	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	1.7	0
Tourist fairs and exhibitions	4.6	1.9	10	6.1	0	3.2	5.5	0	0	7.2	1.7	0
Brochures, advertisements, posters	3.2	1.9	0	2.0	0	4.8	5.5	0	0	1.0	5.3	20
Articles in newspapers or magazines	1.9	3.9	0	6.1	2.1	0	2.7	0	0	1.0	5.3	10
Recommendation from relatives or friends	15.1	19.6	0	16.3	15.2	22.5	11.1	0	10	26.0	3.5	20
Other	6.5	1.9	0	6.1	10.8	4.8	0	0	10	5.2	3.5	0
N/A	0.6	0	0	0	0	1.6	0	0	0	0	1.7	0

Source: *The results of the primary research*

From the age perspective, the tourists under 25 mostly gathered information about a destination from the internet (50%), while among the respondents aged between 25 and 36 previous stay (38.7%) was dominant over the internet (24.4%). The internet retained a dominant position among the participants aged between 36 and 45 (39.4%) as well as among the participants whose age varied between 46 and 60 (35.4%). Finally, the tourists older than 60 highly ranked experiential information about a destination - the previous stay (52.7%) - and then the internet (22.2%) and the recommendations from friends (11.1%).

Just three participants finished elementary school only, and they chose Montenegro as a destination based on their friends' recommendations. The tourists with secondary education highly ranked the previous stay (47.5%), while the internet was assigned secondary importance (32.5%). For the tourists with university education, the previous stay also had the utmost importance (32.2%), while there was a small difference in the importance of the internet (28.1%) and the recommendations from friends (26%). The respondents with master degrees dominantly used the internet (44.6%). Interestingly, the respondents with the highest level of education valued previous experience most i.e. fifteen respondents (out of total 609 respondents) had PhD degrees and 50% of them reported that the information based on their previous stay was the most significant for their selection of a destination.

The example of the destination of Montenegro confirms that the internet is mostly used by the tourists under the age of 25, while the importance of the previous experience increases with the age of respondents. Furthermore, the internet is proven to be a more popular source of information among female tourists compared with male ones. The use of the internet for information gathering increases with the level of education. However, for the tourists with the highest level of education, previous experience again plays the most important role.

5. Discussion

Analysing the age structure of boaters on the East Coast of the Adriatic, we found that the trends are similar to those among boaters at the level of the European Union, where the average age of this category of tourists is moving from 45 to 55 years [22]. Most respondents in Montenegro and Croatia had a university education. The age and educational structure of boaters fit into the thesis that Montenegro and Croatia are successfully developing this elite tourism sector in the function of the future establishment of sustainable businesses and economy [23].

The dominant source of information in choosing both destinations is the previous stay. These are the so-called experiential sources of information the tourist has obtained through personal experience using tourist products or services [24]. According to data from the literature and various studies, the high participation of returnees, in this case, nautical tourists with previous experience in Montenegro (36.4%) and Croatia (31.1%) (Figure 1), suggests that their expectations are from the destination met and/or exceeded [25].

This validates the initial hypothesis that despite the increased use of the internet as a source of information for nautical tourists in the Eastern Adriatic, the information based on previous stay still dominantly affects the choice of a destination.

As a source of information when choosing a destination, the Internet ranks second in terms of participation among nautical tourists on the Eastern Adriatic. Thanks to earlier research, trends for Croatia can be followed for the period from 2004 to 2017, when that share doubled from 19% to 38.4% [20, 26]. According to the results of our survey of boaters' attitudes, 33% of them chose Montenegro as their destination in 2021 using the Internet.

Considering the difficult economic conditions of business and the growth of competition, the creators of online marketing communication strategies have an increasing challenge of adapting to the expanded spectrum of potential clients in the desire to meet their changing expectations. Although websites, thanks to their ability to reach a wide range of international audiences through customizable content, are the primary communication tool, evaluating their impact from the perspective of nautical tourist ports and destinations still needs to be researched [27].

It is no longer enough to advertise that your destination is unique and the best place for a cruise. Boaters today expect to receive additional information through your presentation or mobile application, such as weather conditions, sailing instructions, available capacities in marinas, online booking, service capacities in the vicinity, entertainment, and other additional offers in the marina and surroundings. The use of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets) with an increasing number of specialized mobile applications further complicates the communication process in this sense. Modern devices such as VR for reproducing virtual reality are another tool that provides an opportunity to promote the essential attributes of the destination offers. Internet social networks and specialized groups have a specific role in this segment.

In the nautical world, the recommendation of other sailors, captains, and agents is fundamental due to the complexity of sailing [28]. The results of our research finally confirm this. In Montenegro (16.2%) and Croatia (23.7%), boaters cite a friend's recommendation as a way of choosing a destination, which ranks this source of information about the destination among the three most important.

Traditional sources of information, starting from articles in specialized yachting and other magazines, specially prepared advertising brochures, yachting-marina directories, and guides, then TV and radio broadcasts and advertisements up to performances at specialized nautical and tourism fairs,

continue to play a significant role in the promotion and choice of destination. As part of our survey conducted in Montenegro in 2021, 10% of them mentioned some traditional sources as a way of information in choosing a destination.

Finally, the habit of a certain number of sailors to begin the process of information about their future destination with the help of traditional communication tools (specialized magazines, port directories, fairs, etc.), has been improved through integration - connecting with Internet communication technologies using the presented links and QR codes that lead to destination web presentations and mobile applications [28].

In that regard, it can be concluded that the study additionally confirms the previous findings that Montenegro lacks the strategic documents that would define the direction of the development of nautical tourism at a destination level [29]. The results obtained could, therefore, be used for the preparation of strategic documentation related to marketing communication.

6. Conclusions

The paper shows that the sources of information are valuable for the understanding of the selection of nautical destinations, whereby the initially defined aims of the research were reached respectively.

Firstly, the research defined the basic characteristics of the tourists who visit the Eastern Adriatic. The cross-tabulation of the data obtained from the responses categorized by the characteristics of respondents, indicated that there are not significant specificities that would facilitate the differentiation of efficient communication models through the application of marketing segmentation strategies. Considering the age and education structure, we conclude that there is no longer a generational gap in terms of familiarity with new digital technologies among nautical tourists. Bearing in mind the results of the subject research, which unequivocally indicate the growth of the importance of internet communication technologies in creating destination marketing strategies, it is necessary to ensure continuous evaluation and harmonization of digital communication channels of individual offer holders. By integrating through the connection of different segments of the offer by applying appropriate algorithmic schemes, an opportunity is created to improve the competitive position and strengthen the brand of Montenegro as a nautical tourist destination.

Secondly, the study compared the sources of information for the tourists who visit Montenegro and Croatia and answered the research question. A similar trend was observed in both destinations - a dominant source of information in both destinations is the previous experience. The internet is

increasingly popular and highly ranked along with traditional sources of information such as recommendations from friends, exhibitions and fairs that still play an important role. Such findings confirm the initial hypothesis that the internet is increasingly important in modern marketing of nautical destinations such as Montenegro and Croatia. However, “adjusted” traditional sources of information retained their significance when it comes to the selection of a destination. The research hence confirmed the initial hypothesis, previous stay plays an important role when it comes to the choice of a destination. For that reason, decision makers should pay more attention to the satisfaction of tourists when defining marketing communication, during and after the stay of the tourists in order to enable rational investments in the resources that are available and transparent for the majority of the tourists.

Further research should focus on the detection of the reasons which render the previous stay a dominant source of information for the tourists who choose to visit the Eastern Adriatic. Based on the observed tourist satisfaction, the future research should also identify the strategic aspects of a destination that should be more developed. In relation to the increasing use of the internet, further research could investigate the digital marketing tools that are used for the information provision for nautical tourists, which would consequently provide a scientific basis for the enhancement and application of the tools examined.

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