

Tourism, safety, and health information provided on European country websites: A content analysis

Turismo, segurança e **informação sobre saúde** fornecida pelos **websites** dos países europeus: análise de conteúdo

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Abstract | This study assessed the content provided on national tourism websites of 28 European countries. Websites were evaluated for content presented based on 36 topics related to categories of destination/promotion (n = 14 topics), safety/security (n = 11 topics), local authority contacts (n = 3 topics), and health/healthcare (n = 8 topics). A content analysis was conducted for official tourism websites utilizing a content rubric containing 36 topics. The percent of topics represented on official websites ranged from 25.0% to 83.3%. Approximately 61% (n = 17) of countries reported information about 50% or more of the topics contained in the rubric. In terms of destination/promotion, all 28 official websites contained information about characteristics of main cities (100%), and each website provided recommendations to tourists regarding destinations to visit (100%), cultural attractions (100%), and natural attractions (100%). However, only 35.7% of websites contained information about the security status of the country or in specific regions/cities, 25% reported information about dangerous locations as related to criminality or terrorism, and 39.3% of websites provided recommendations about ways in which to avoid criminality or terrorism. Findings reveal highlights opportunities for improved efforts to meet the specific needs and behaviors of tourists visiting Europe.

Keywords | Tourism, website, content analysis, Europe

Resumo | Este estudo avaliou o conteúdo fornecido em sites nacionais de turismo de 28 países europeus. Os sites foram avaliados por conteúdo apresentado com base em 36 tópicos relacionados a categorias de destino / promoção (n = 14 tópicos), segurança / segurança (n = 11 tópicos), contactos de autoridades locais (n = 3 tópicos) e saúde / cuidados de saúde = 8 tópicos). Uma análise de conteúdo foi realizada para sites de turismo oficial utilizando uma rubrica de conteúdo contendo 36 tópicos. A percentagem de tópicos representados em sites oficiais variou de 25,0% a 83,3%. Aproximadamente 61% (n = 17) dos países relataram informações sobre 50% ou mais dos tópicos contidos na rubrica. Em termos de destino

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/ promoção, todos os 28 sites oficiais continham informações sobre as características das principais cidades (100%) e cada site forneceu recomendações aos turistas quanto aos destinos a visitar (100%), atrações culturais (100%) e atrações naturais 100%). Entretanto, apenas 35,7% dos sites continham informações sobre o status de segurança do país ou em regiões / cidades específicas, 25% relataram informações sobre locais perigosos relacionados à criminalidade ou ao terrorismo e 39,3% dos sites forneceram recomendações sobre maneiras de evitar Criminalidade ou terrorismo. Os resultados revelam oportunidades para melhorar os esforços para atender às necessidades e comportamentos específicos dos turistas que visitam a Europa.

Palavras-chave | Turismo, local na rede Internet, análise de conteúdo, Europa

1. Introduction

Several internal and external factors can influence the decision-making and purchasing behaviors of tourists. From an internal perspective, the tourist is influenced by their personal preferences and characteristics such as motivation, lifestyle, financial status, and cultural influences. Conversely, when considering the external perspective, the tourist takes into account characteristics of the destination such as political status, socioeconomics, geography, and the local residents (demographics and culture). The external perspective also encompasses the influence of the destination's promotion, which utilizes a variety of strategies to highlight marketable aspects of the area. The combination of these internal and external factors largely influences travelers' decisions as to whether or not they visit a specific destination (Kotler et al., 2010; Middleton, 2002; Cooper et al., 2001; Moutinho, 2011; Buhalis and Costa, 2006).

Countries viewed as touristic destinations are usually promoted by public management and marketing agencies that provide information to the tourist deemed to be influential, attractive, and persuasive. Although promotion strategies in a competitive market primarily emphasize a destination's strengths, they also acknowledge poten-

tial weaknesses. However, as can be expected, promotion strategies often downplay the destination's weaknesses in an attempt to avoid travel deterrents. Hiding problems associated to security and safety (e.g., criminality, adverse weather conditions, issues of terrorism), for example, can increase the tourist's exposure to travel-related risk and compromise their satisfaction with the touristic experience. Therefore, if the aim of strategies to promote touristic destinations is to increase the touristic demand, information about a variety of topics should be made widely available and disseminated to tourists to ensure they can make informed decisions when selecting travel destinations.

Despite a variety of channels in which to advertise the destinations, attractions, and amenities available in a country, internet-based traveler recruitment is among the most effective and serves as an informative and educational resource for potential travelers (Corigliano and Baggio, 2006; Law and Bai, 2006; Law, Qi, and Buhalis, 2010; Lu, Lu, and Zhang, 2002). The benefits of internet-based marketing include their ability to: (1) reach a large number of individuals across geographic boundaries for minimal cost; (2) share as much or as little information as desired (and tailored to specific tourist target audiences); (3) incorporate high quality graphics/images, sound, and video to complement

website content and excite the tourist; and (4) provide current information about local news, events, and travel advisories. Although countries overtly use their official websites for marketing and promotion, they are also useful for educating tourists about potential safety, security, and health-related risks and considerations, which if properly planned for and avoided during travel, can protect the tourist and enhance the overall satisfaction associated with their travels (Buhalis and Costa, 2006; Kotler, 2010).

While the influence and effectiveness of the internet as a marketing and promotion tool is recognized in the tourism industry (Hudson, 2008), less is known about the specific content provided to patrons online. Herein, the primary purpose of this investigation was to assess the content provided on official national tourism websites of 28 European countries as it pertained to the topics of destinations/promotion, safety/security, contact information, and health/health care. A secondary purpose of this examination was to identify opportunities for countries to improve their tourism websites for potential travelers to enhance their visiting experience. Practical recommendations about specific ways in which website content can be complemented will be provided.

2. Promoting destinations

The promotion of touristic destinations is more complex than enterprise-level marketing. The reason for this complexity is because enterprise can somewhat control the quality of the products and services provided in the market; whereas, marketing a country comprises a set of products and services offered by individual entities while represented by a larger public or quasi-public organization (Hudson, 2008). This complexity is an existing reality in the tourism industry because the product being sold is an amalgam of different products and

services that complement one other. In the case of destination promotion, public agencies are responsible for providing touristic information and shaping the overall image of the destination. However, this causes a situation where there is only indirect control of the “internal variables” by the public organizations because the touristic product quality is part of individuals’ enterprise in the private sector (Kotler, 2010; Cooper et al., 2001; Buhalis and Costa, 2006). Stated another way, although the public sector recruits tourists and markets attractions, the actual services provided to tourists upon arrival are in the private sector, thus not regulated by the public organizations.

Public Marketing Agencies of countries develop and implement a set of promotional strategies to share information and construct an image that positions the country to increase their destination’s desirability to an international audience (Middleton, 2002). If successful, the country will then increase the number of international tourists as well as the average length of stay and spending per tourist. Although the marketing agency provides the touristic offer to travelers, it is necessary that they first understand the touristic demand (current, potential, and desired) so the offer can be effectively organized and communicated to the target audience (Kozac & Andreu, 2006; Kotler, 2010).

3. An emphasis on official websites

A country’s official website is a fundamental tool international destination promotion because it is a widely available, easily accessible, and inexpensive format in which tourists use to search for and identify information about destinations while deciding where to travel or vacation. Official tourism websites are viewed as a trusted source of information that provides neutral information to potential tourists (Fesenmejer & Werthner, 2006) and where past tourists can share their experiences

and recommendations for places, equipment, and services. More than merely promoting a destination's accommodations, attractions, and activities, it is important that these websites provide basic facts about the destination. According to Pearce (2005), "a good tourist site (one likely to promote positive on-site experiences), offers the public clear conceptions of what the place is about, the activities available are understood and accessible, and the physical elements that constitute the setting are distinctive and aesthetically pleasing."

Official tourism websites may be helpful to tourists during the process of deciding where to travel. First, a tourist creates a list of possible destinations of interest, which is primarily driven and influenced by internal factors (i.e., personal characteristics and life experience) (Kozac & Andreu, 2006). Then, external factors lead the potential tourist to search for information and compare the possibilities by analyzing relevant variables (e.g. distance, price, climate, vaccination restrictions, safety concerns, security issues) (Kotler et al., 2010; Middleton, 2002; Cooper et.al., 2001; Moutinho, 2011). If constructed well, the country's website can provide information about these variables, which contributes to the tourists' selection process.

Once the destination has been selected and the vacation has been purchased, tourists can also utilize official websites to gather more information about the destination to enhance their touristic experience and minimize encountering risks during their travel (Kozac & Andreu, 2006). By the traveler having the opportunity to learn about the destination, tourists can better protect themselves from potential dangers, choose the better products/services for their needs/desires, and improve their level of satisfaction with the touristic experience and the destination. Traveling without proper preparation, planning, and education causes uncertainty about the forthcoming tourist experi-

ence and increases the chances of negative consequences. Therefore, travelers should proactively seek out information about recommended behaviors (e.g., vaccinations, protection from criminal victimization) or healthcare (e.g., medical care options and accessibility), they are decreasing their level of travel-related risks (Fesenmejer & Werthner, 2006; Fuchs & Reichel; Korstanje, 2009).

4. Methodology

In the context of worldwide tourism, Europe is an important receptor market, which represents 39.2% of the market share in international arrivals and 36.6% in international tourism receipts (WTO, 2012). Five European countries rank in the top 10 categories in international arrivals and receipts (i.e., France, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, and Germany). In fact, these five European destinations moved about 240 million tourists which equates to approximately US\$231 billion. The relevance of this region as a touristic destination justifies the need to analyze aspects of its touristic promotion in response to this expressed traveler demand. The content provided to tourists on official websites (i.e., websites developed and hosted by the country government) is one aspect requiring examination because of their ability to promote destinations and attract potential travelers. It is important to attract more tourists, so that additional money can be introduced into the country, which results in a positive payment balance. It is also important to satisfy this substantial touristic demand by making efforts to earn tourists' loyalty, ensuring their touristic experience will exceed expectations, and increasing the likelihood they will subsequently recommend the destination to their family and friends.

¹The European Union (EU) is a political and economic partnership between 28 signatory countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherland, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden,

A content analysis was conducted using official tourism websites of 28 European countries (countries adherent of the European Union [EU]).¹ Websites were evaluated utilizing a content rubric, which was developed by study investigators and guided by literature pertaining to relevant tourism, safety, security, and health topics. A total of 36 topics were identified and included in the rubric. Using this rubric, official websites were assessed related to destination/promotion (i.e., city characteristics, recommended destinations, attractions, transportation, lodging, climate, cultural aspects, and accessible tourism), safety/security (i.e., dangerous locations, recommendations to avoid crime, and airline travel as well as food, water, and wildlife safety), local authority contact information (i.e., embassy/consulates, security force, health care), and health/health care (i.e., vaccination requirements, health system information, and prescription medication information as well as laws/regulations about drugs, alcohol, tobacco, driving, and sexual behaviors) (Smith, Amorim, Silverman, Umbelino, 2015a, 2015b).

All portions of the websites were reviewed for content regarding the above mentioned topics and sub-topics. Information obtained from each website was recorded in the content rubric. Rubric cells were marked with an "x" to indicate the website included content about the topic or sub-topic. Column totals were summed and frequencies were calculated.

5. Findings

Table 1 reports available data for the number of international travel arrivals and monetary receipts by European country (WTO, 2013). In 2011, an approximate total of 400.8 million international arrivals were received by the 28 countries with France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom (WTO, 2012).

United Kingdom representing the largest proportion of travelers. In 2012, an approximate total of 410.6 million international arrivals were received by the 28 countries with the same five countries representing the largest proportion of travelers. It is important to note that modest growth in international travel arrivals was observed from 2011 to 2012, and this is with missing 2012 figures for Bulgaria, Denmark, Ireland, and Lithuania. Regarding monetary receipts, an approximate total of US\$ 388.7 million were received in 2011 and US\$ 376.5 million in 2012 by the 28 countries. Countries with the largest monetary receipts mirrored the leading countries receiving the largest proportion of travelers.

Table 2 reports findings from the content analyses of 28 European countries' official websites. Websites were evaluated for content presented based on 36 topics related to categories of destination/promotion ($n = 14$ topics), safety/security ($n = 11$ topics), local authority contacts ($n = 3$ topics), and health/healthcare ($n = 8$ topics). It is important to note that some topics may be appropriately classified in multiple categories. The percent of topics represented on official websites ranged from 25.0% to 83.3%. Approximately 61% ($n = 17$) of countries reported information about 50% or more of the topics contained in the rubric, and 39.3% ($n = 11$) of countries reported information more than 60% of the topics. Approximately 18% ($n = 5$) of countries reported information about less than 40% of the topics.

In terms of destination/promotion, all 28 official websites contained information about characteristics of main cities (100%), and each website provided recommendations to tourists regarding destinations to visit (100%), cultural attractions (100%), and natural attractions (100%). While 92.9% of websites contained information about their country's climate, all websites provided information about transportation (100%) and lod-

ging (100%). Regarding aspects of local culture, 82.1% provided information about language, 75.0% about food, and 64.3% about religion. Half of the 28 websites contained information specific

to accessible tourism topics including transportation (50%), services (50%), equipment (50%), and locations/attractions (50%).

Table 1 | International travel arrivals and monetary receipts by country

COUNTRY	Arrivals*			Receipts in US\$ Million		
	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012
Austria	22,004	23,012	24,151	18,596	19,860	18,894
Belgium	7,186	7,456	7,505	10,359	11,313	11,381
Bulgaria	6,047	6,324	--	3,637	3,967	3,748
Croatia	9,111	9,927	10,369	8,259	9,185	8,774
Cyprus	2,173	2,392	2,465	2,153	2,520	2,600
Czech Republic	8,629	8,775	8,908	7,121	7,628	7,035
Denmark	8,744	--	--	5,704	6,165	6,162
Estonia	2,120	2,460	2,744	1,062	1,248	1,226
Finland	3,670	4,192	4,226	2,902	3,646	4,139
France	77,148	79,500	83,018	46,560	53,845	53,697
Germany	26,875	28,352	30,408	34,675	38,842	38,114
Greece	15,007	16,427	15,518	12,742	14,623	12,879
Hungary	9,510	10,250	10,353	5,381	5,580	4,845
Ireland	6,515	--	--	4,077	4,644	4,078
Italy	43,626	46,119	46,360	38,786	42,999	41,185
Latvia	1,373	1,493	1,435	640	771	745
Lithuania	1,507	--	--	1,021	1,353	1,313
Luxembourg	793	543	889	4,116	4,535	4,486
Malta	1,336	1,412	1,454	1,079	1,265	1,265
Netherlands	10,883	11,300	11,680	12,883	14,445	13,887
Poland	12,470	13,350	14,840	9,526	10,687	10,938
Portugal	6,832	7,432	7,696	10,077	11,339	11,056
Romania	1,343	1,515	1,653	1,140	1,417	1,467
Slovakia	1,327	1,460	1,511	2,233	2,429	2,299
Slovenia	1,869	2,037	2,156	2,566	2,708	2,577
Spain	52,677	56,694	57,701	52,525	59,892	55,916
Sweden	4,951	5,029	10,914	11,080	13,886	15,427
United Kingdom	28,299	29,192	29,282	32,401	35,928	36,373
TOTAL	374,025	376,643	387,236	345,311	386,720	376,506

*Multiply above figures by 1,000 for actual arrivals

Source: World Tourism Organization

In terms of safety and security, 35.7% of websites contained information about the security status of the country or in specific regions/cities, 25% reported information about dangerous locations as related to criminality or terrorism, and 39.3% of websites provided recommendations about ways in which to avoid criminality or terrorism. Regarding content specific to airline travel, 92.9% of websites provided information about currency, 92.9% about immigration (or Visa requirements), 50.0% about customs, 7.1% about travel restrictions, and 0.0% about safety recommendations. Of the 28 websites, 35.7% contained information about water safety, 14.3% about local wildlife safety, and 17.9%

about food safety.

In terms of local authority contacts, 78.6% of websites provided contact information specific to health care, 67.9% provided contact information specific to security forces, and 35.7% provided contact information specific to national Embassies or Consulates.

In terms of health and healthcare, 75.0% of websites contained information about the health care system including content about insurance, and 46.4% provided information about prescription medications. Approximately 29% of websites listed requirements about vaccinations. Regarding laws and regulations related health topics, 67.9%

of websites provided information about driving a motor vehicle, 28.6% about tobacco use, 14.3% about alcoholic beverage consumption, and 3.6% about sexual behavior.

6. Discussion

Findings from this content analysis reveal that information about a wide variety of topics is contained on official websites, although some countries provide more information than others. While the primary purpose of these websites is to promote destinations and attract tourists, they offer an outlet to educate tourists about other important safety, security, and health-related topics. Thereby, official websites afford countries with additional opportunity to provide important information necessary to inform and protect travelers.

Although some official websites reported only a quarter of the topics encompassed by the content rubric, it is of no surprise that all websites contained promotional information related to their primary cities, destinations, attractions, transportation, and lodging (Avraham, 2006; Kotler, 2010; Cooper et. al., 2001). This is because the primary purpose of official tourism websites is to serve as a promotional tool that also acts as a medium to enable tourists to access important information capable of influencing their travel-related decisions. To ensure that travel to a particular destination materializes, a potential tourist requires a minimum amount of basic information about transportation, hotels, and touristic facilities. However, before this travel can occur, the tourist needs to become motivated to depart from their local residence and visit the destination. For this reason, it is not enough that official websites provide basic tourist information, but also promotional information about the destination's attractiveness. In the current study, all 28 European country official websites included ba-

sic and promotional information, which indicates the primary purpose of the website was achieved. While additional information was offered on some of the websites (e.g., climate, aspects of culture), they may be seen as "extra" content that is outside the scope of the institutional objectives of the website's hosting agency. Considering official websites are viewed by tourists as trusted and reliable sources of information about destinations, providing additional content about topics external to promotion may be helpful to influence tourists' intentions to travel and attract them to particular destinations. This is because this shows that the agency cares about the touristic experience quality and satisfaction of the traveler, which in turn, can instill higher levels of confidence and feelings of comfort among tourists (in both selecting destinations and planning their travels). It should also be noted that the emergence of other tourism websites and applications (e.g., Trip Advisor) provide useful information to travelers; however, these websites/applications also emphasize the destination, not necessarily safety or health issues. Regardless, such non-official tourism websites/applications are growing in popularity and should consider expanding the breadth of content they contain.

Findings from this investigation revealed that only 50% of European country websites contained information about accessible tourism. While the concept of accessible tourism is still emerging (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2011; Smith, Amorim, and Soares, 2013), the demand for accessible tourism-related services and equipment (as well as transportation and accessibility to certain attractions) is rapidly growing because of global increases in the aging population and travelers with physical and mental disabilities (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Kinsella & Phillips, 2005; Smith, Amorim & Umbelino, 2013). The growing proportion of travelers in the accessible tourism market are known to be loyal destination patrons and spend more time and money when traveling than common tourists

(Smith & Amorim, 2013). These tourists also travel with others (family or assistants), which results in even larger amounts of potential revenue for destinations. Unfortunately, the demand for accessible tourism may currently exceed the ability of the tourism industry's level of preparation to accommodate these travelers and provide high-quality services. While half of the European countries provided information about accessible tourism on their official websites (which is higher than percentages reported about other important topics), providing this information on websites cri-

tical because it may contribute to decisions about whether or not an aging or disabled travelers selects to travel to a particular destination (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Butler & Hall, 2006). Individuals needing particular services are likely to only travel to destinations that can adequately receive them. Although a tourist may not select to travel to a destination only because it is accessible, a tourist with accessible tourism needs will avoid destinations that are not accessible.

Table 2 | Percent of countries reporting each topic*

TOPIC	Percent of Countries Reported
DESTINATION / PROMOTION	
Main City Characteristics (size, population, history, etc.)	100.0\%
Recommended Destinations	100.0\%
Recommended Attractions	--
Cultural	100.0\%
Natural	100.0\%
Transportation	100.0\%
Lodging	100.0\%
Climate	92.9\%
Aspects of Local Culture	--
Religion	64.3\%
Language	82.1\%
Food	75.0\%
Accessible Tourism**	--
Transportation	50.0\%
Services	50.0\%
Equipment	50.0\%
Locations/Attractions	50.0\%
SAFETY & SECURITY	
Security in the Country or Specific Regions/Cities	35.7\%
Dangerous Locations (criminality/terrorism)	25.0\%
Recommendations about Criminality/Terrorism Avoidance	39.3\%
Airline Travel	--
Safety Recommendations	0.0\%
Travel Restrictions	7.1\%
Customs	50.0\%
Immigration/Visa	92.9\%
Currency	92.9\%
Food Safety**	17.9\%
Water Safety (especially for coastal areas) **	35.7\%
Local Wildlife Safety (insects, animals, etc.) **	14.3\%
LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTACTS	
Embassy/Consulates Contacts	35.7\%
Security Force Contacts	67.9\%
Health Care Contacts	78.6\%
HEALTH & HEALTH CARE	
Vaccination Requirements	28.6\%
Health System Information (including insurance)	75.0\%

Prescription Medication Information (including purchasing)	46.4\%
Drug Consumption (Laws)	3.6\%
Alcoholic Beverage Consumption (Laws)	14.3\%
Tobacco Use (Laws)	28.6\%
Driving (Laws)	67.9\%
Sexual Behavior (Laws)	3.6\%

* 28 countries represented in analyses

**Topics also considered to be related to health

Source: Own construction

Findings from this investigation revealed that these countries' official websites don't generally provide information about safety or security issues. For example, only about 36% of the 28 websites included information about security in the country or particular regions/cities, 25% reported dangerous locations, and 39.5% reported ways to avoid criminality or terrorism. Making information about safety and security to tourists is especially important because they are commonly targeted for victimization. The reason they are easily targeted is that they are traveling outside the context of their daily lives, visiting unfamiliar locations, and being in contact with a community (and its people) consisting of different cultural and social-economic characteristics. Even in the most secure places, tourists are somewhat vulnerable because the environment is unknown to them and their travel behavior is relaxed and "care-free." It is recommended that official tourism websites provide timely and relevant safety and security information and recommendations to future travelers pertaining to the safety/dangers of certain places, situations, and behaviors (Holcomb & Pizam, 2006; Tarlow, 2012; Fuchs & Racheil, 2006; Hall, Timothy and Durval, 2009).

Limited information was also provided about airline travel and other safety issues. For example, no websites provided information about safety recommendations for airline travel, and 7.1% reported information about travel restrictions. While most official websites reported information about currency and immigration, tourists could benefit from additional information about navigating air-

port processes and what to expect upon arrival at a new destination. A small proportion of official websites contained information about water (35%), food (18%), and wildlife (14%) safety. Considering tourists often select a destination for the available attractions and outdoor activities, providing additional information about these safety topics can assist travelers to select destinations and plan their excursions while accounting for potential risks introduced to them by indigenous features of a community. Similarly related to travel safety, driving is a common issue that requires particular attention. Although about 68% of official websites provided information about this topic, this percentage seems low considering the vast differences between countries related to road conditions, signage, speed limits, side of vehicle operation (right or left), pedestrian rights, and legal limits in which to operate vehicles after consuming alcohol.

Findings also highlight the importance of health as a safety and security issue, which is commonly overlooked in the tourism industry, but should be included in relevant investigations and discussions (Smith, Amorim, Silverman, Umbelino, 2015a, 2015b). A large aspect of protecting travelers is to emphasize health- and health care-related topics. This enables travelers to know what types of common risks they may encounter and will assist them to adequately prepare and take necessary precautions. Although about 75% of official websites in this study included information about health care systems, only 46% included information about prescription medications and 29% inclu-

ded information about vaccination requirements. These findings indicate the tourism industry's focus on treatment in the instance of adversity rather than primary prevention. Health is also important to consider because when people travel, they engage in certain behaviors outside of the context of their homeland (e.g., alcohol, sex, driving), visit new locations, and may not speak the native language. This desire to experiment and experience new things may become risky if they are not sufficiently informed about the culture, laws, and risks (Hall, Timothy and Durval, 2009). In this study, information about laws pertaining to drug use (4%), alcohol consumption (14%), tobacco use (29%), and sexual behaviors (4%) were somewhat scant. The absence of this type of information on official websites may foster ignorance about acceptable and tolerated behaviors while traveling, which may have health and legal consequences. Although nations have the need to support and sustain their economy through tourism, they also have the responsibility to inform prospective travelers so they can make informed decisions about whether or not to visit and become aware of the potential dangers.

This investigation is not without limitations. It must be acknowledged that the format and organization of information provided on the websites were inconsistent and often in a variety of languages. Thus, locating all relevant information contained in the content rubric was somewhat challenging, and it is plausible that information could have been present but overlooked by the investigators. Only one investigator performed the content assessments for all websites, which is both positive and negative. A single investigator is good for process and context uniformity; however, having a second investigator perform website assessments would have enabled more definitive confirmation about the presence or absence of website content. The authors recognize this investigation was not all encompassing. There may have been other topics omitted from the content rubric that should

have been included. Further, a large level of detail about the specific information provided for each rubric topic was not collected and is deemed outside the scope of this study. It should also be acknowledged that the low frequency of topics reported on official websites may be attributed to the absence of an issue in that country (and that it is not the primary purpose of the website). For example, a country may not list vaccination requirements on their website because no vaccinations are required for entry into the country. However, the website should still explicitly state that no vaccinations are required. Because tourists consider these websites to be authoritative in nature, they trust and rely upon the information contained therein. Because these tourists are less educated about the destination and potential dangers, they may misinterpret the absence of information as the absence of danger or risk.

7. Conclusion

A country's official websites has multiple functions and can work as an efficient promotional tool from which travelers can base their destination selection. In this examination of 28 European countries' official tourism websites, all 28 contained tourism/destination-related information. However, substantially fewer websites contained information about accessible tourism, security status, or dangers related to criminality or terrorism, which is confirmed in other studies (Smith, Amorim, Silverman, Umbelino, 2015a, 2015b). By providing a variety of information on a country's official website, they may enhance their marketing and promotion by fostering a sense of comfort among tourists. By adding content on websites beyond mere promotion about amenities and attractions, tourists can begin trusting the destination in that they care about their travelers' safety, security, health, and wellbeing.

This investigation justifies the need for official websites to provide trustworthy and complete information to their potential tourists. An honest posture can help establish a reliable relationship with the tourist and also allow more control of and prevention against negative events and occurrences. In terms of marketing and recruiting tourists to a country, it is not advantageous to hide problems about safety or security and safety associated with a particular destination, which may expose travelers to avoidable harm. For example, warning tourists about health and security problems has potential to actually save the destination money related health care, legal issues, and costs of unnecessary action of security and safety forces. Further, in the event of negative experiences of tourists, the destination may be required to spend additional funds to reestablish a positive image and good reputation in the market. Moreover, websites can provide valuable information that informs the tourist about how they should act (in a culturally appropriate manner) and the types of activities, locations, and people they should avoid.

Using the internet for educational purposes makes information about potential risks and dangers (e.g., security, recommendations for safety, and descriptions of laws/regulations) easily accessible and available to all potential travelers. It is not only a responsibility of the destination country, but it is also a useful way to minimize internal problems that can negatively impact the touristic demand and the destination's image (Tarrow, 2012). As indicated by Kotler and colleagues (2010: 527), "effective destination imaging requires congruence between advertising and the destination [...] otherwise, destinations run the risk of losing tourist goodwill and generating bad word-of-mouth."

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