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PROFILE OF THE NATIONAL ALENTEJO ONLINE VISITOR: ANALYSIS OF THE OFFICIAL TOURISM WEBSITE USING GOOGLE ANALYTICS

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Resumo: A crescente utilização da Internet pelas empresas e consumidores tornou a Internet numa importante fonte de dados para suporte à tomada de decisão em diferentes áreas do conhecimento. O turismo é um dos setores que mais impactos sofre com as mudanças introduzidas pela Internet. Essas alterações foram sentidas em vários aspetos, sendo um deles a necessidade e possibilidade de aceder a informação turística relevante e disponível em tempo real, permitindo a otimização da estratégia de marketing digital. O objetivo principal deste artigo é mostrar que os dados da Internet, nomeadamente do Google Analytics [GA], fornecem informação sobre o perfil do visitante nacional do destino Alentejo, com base no website oficial do Turismo do Alentejo. O estudo foca-se, essencialmente, no movimento e visitas dos portugueses no mais importante *website* do Turismo do Alentejo. Os resultados mostram que os dados do GA podem contribuir para conhecer, em tempo real, o perfil do visitante do Alentejo. Além disso, podem servir de suporte ao processo de tomada de decisão ao marketing das organizações de gestão de destinos [DMO].

Palavras chave: Google Analytics, Turismo, Internet, Alentejo, *Website*

Abstract: The increasing adoption of the Internet by enterprises and consumers make this an important source of data for supporting decision making in different fields of knowledge. The sector of tourism is one that truly noticed the changes boosted by the Internet. This impact was felt in several aspects, one of them being the need and possibility to access real time and relevant tourist information enabling to optimise digital marketing strategies. The main purpose of this article is to show that the Internet data, namely Google Analytics [GA] data, provides information about the national visitor profile of the Alentejo destination, based on the official Alentejo region website. This study focuses on the Portuguese actions and visits in the most important website of tourism of Alentejo. The findings show that the data from GA can contribute to the Alentejo visitor's profile knowledge, in real time, and for mainly supporting marketing decision making processes of Destination Management Organizations [DMO].

Keywords: Google Analytics, Tourism, Internet, Alentejo, Website

Introduction

Today's hyper-connected traveller uses the Internet in all phases of the travel cycle. These phases are: dreaming, researching, booking, experiencing and sharing (Moreno de la Santa, 2011). That process can last for several days and passes through different channels. Moreover, tourism enterprises and DMO need to understand how, when and where the tourist consumer uses the Internet, particularly the marketing channels in the travellers' decision making process, for searching information, choosing the tourism destination/service, and performing the purchase. For that purpose and to enable a fast reaction, tourism enterprises and DMO need to adopt tools like GA, which can help them obtaining the right information to act accordingly.

The aim of this paper is to show that the Internet data, namely GA data, from the Alentejo's official tourism website can contribute in characterising the profile of the Portuguese visitor to the Alentejo destination. Alentejo is the Portuguese tourist region with the highest number of nights spent in accommodations establishments by residents in Portugal (Turismo de Portugal, 2013), and the Portuguese are also the biggest number of visitors to this tourism region (approximately 71% of the total) (Observatório Regional do Turismo do Alentejo, 2013). However, the information available for the Statistics Portugal is not enough for decision making, when facing the changes in consumer behaviour, and is later available to the tourism organizations. Our study is based on Internet data obtained using the Google Analytics tool for the website visitalentejo.pt concerning the period 01/01/2007 to 31/12/2012, the official website for the Alentejo Tourism.

This paper is structured as follows. Firstly, we present a literature review; secondly, we describe the used methodology. Finally, the results and the analysis performed are presented, ending with the conclusions.

Literature Review

In 2013, 96% of the enterprises in the 28 European Union countries had access to the Internet (Eurostat, 2014^a). In Portugal the rate of access to the Internet is equal to the European Union [EU] countries. Regarding the presence in the Internet, in the same year, the average of enterprises with a website or homepage was 73%, namely medium and large enterprises (only 24% of the small enterprises had a website or homepage) (Eurostat, 2014^b). Relatively to tourism organizations, they are between the pioneers in Internet adoption and e-commerce activity (Buhalis, 2003). Nowadays, according to Crouch (2000) few tourism destinations do not have their own website in the Internet. Palmer (2002) says that since nowadays all destinations can have a website, this isn't enough to guarantee the success of a tourist destination, the destination should have a "coherent strategy to develop, position and promote an electronic presence" (p. 139).

In the opinion of So e Morrison (2003), DMO must better understand the potential value of their websites when compared to others means of promotion, and the potential impact of the website as a means of communication with visitors. In the study they realized, the authors concluded that "a significantly high proportion of individuals who consulted the websites of the two DMO analysed visited the destinations" (p. 137).

According to a study conducted by Travelport (2010), in early 2010, in 12 different countries, 40% and 32% of the leisure and business travellers, respectively, consulted the websites of their destination while planning the trip.

Due to the increasing use of the Internet by consumers, enterprises and organizations in the field of tourism, the Internet also became an important source of data and information. Focusing on DMO, nowadays they are more equipped for understanding the necessities of the tourist consumer and providing personalized products, focused on each individual's needs (Bender, 1997 cited in Cai, Feng & Breiter, 2004). However, and according to Expedia Inc. all (2010) the DMO are significantly changing from advertising in traditional media to online advertising, the organizations are carrying out the monitoring of the websites, but rarely include metrics on the needs and preferences of Internet users.

The study made in the Bournemouth University, eTourismLab and the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse to 30 online destinations all over the world, concluded that most of the destinations do not explore or know how to use the wide range of technological tools available for the promotion of online destinations and techniques to attract visitors.

Most of the 30 analysed destinations sites focused only on providing information to the phase "before the trip", while very few sites used any kind of technology to the phases "during" or "after" the trip (Tnooz, 2012). Buhalis and O'Connor (2006) state that for a better understanding of choices, concerns and purposes about the tourist consumer organizations they must collect information at different stages of the journey. According to Law, Leung & Buhalis (2009) the better the DMO understand the profile of the tourist and travel patterns, the more it is able to sell the tourist destinations.

In a DMO digital marketing strategy, the information about the destination must be adequate to the targeted market and the used marketing channel. And, for such, the organizations need information to support their decisions and technological tools that can help in that regard (Dinis, Costa & Pacheco, 2012).

Web analytics is defined as "the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of Internet data for the purpose of understanding and optimizing Web usage" (cited in Dinis, Costa & Pacheco, 2012). And, according to Tonkin, Whitmore and Cutroni (2010), "Web analytics involve closely monitoring and measuring visitor behaviour, customer feedback, desired outcomes, and competitive context in order to make smarter decisions about your online strategy" (p. 9). There are several web analytics tools on the market, however, in the opinion of the authors, GA is an important web analytic tool that can form the backbone of online measurement strategies of the organizations.

The GA is a tool that collects data and quantitative measures and analyses the site traffic pattern (Cutroni, 2011). It is a tool available for free in the market and that can be used by enterprises and organizations from all branches that own a website on the Internet. According to a survey done by W3Techs, in 19 of July 2014, the GA is used by 49,6 % of all websites, which means a traffic analysis tools market share of 81,2% (W3Techs, 2014). GA is thus a tool indispensable for tourism enterprises and DMO to analyse who are and the kind of usage visitors make of the website and web in general with the particularity that the data is available to use.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to characterise the profile of the Portuguese visitor to the Alentejo tourism region located in the South of Portugal through the GA data. For that, we based our analyses in the official Alentejo tourism promotional website (<http://www.visitalentejo>). This is for two reasons, first, because it is the website most referenced by the visitors as an online source of information used in their trips, according to the survey conducted in 2011 and 2012 by the Observatório Regional de Turismo do Alentejo (2013), and second, because the administrator of the website, promptly, gave us authorization to study and analyse their GA data.

The website in analysis was launched in 2005 by the Regional Tourism Promotion Agency of Alentejo - Tourism of Alentejo, a non-profit private law association composed by representatives of Alentejo's economic agents from the tourism sector, with the purpose of officially promoting the Alentejo destination and to inform the tourists (ARPTA, 2008 cited in Dinis, Costa & Pacheco, 2012). In December 2011, the website was subjected to a thorough restructuring. The web site is available in six European languages, namely French, German, English, Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish, and is available with diverse functionalities. Using the model developed by Burgess & Cooper (2000) cited in Doolin, Burgess & Cooper (2001), we can classify the website is in the state of development of level two, since it integrates interacting features with the visitor, including FAQs, maps, downloadable materials, newsletter, creation of personal routes in Alentejo, etc. Since 2007 that statistics are being collected from the site using the GA (<http://www.google.com/analytics/>) and used as information to support the decisions made (Dinis, Costa & Pacheco, 2012).

The data analysis was made for the period 01/01/2007 to 31/12/2012 and downloaded in Excel Format. The analysis focused on the reports of GA we consider important to the purpose of the paper, namely: behaviour; sources/medium of traffic; geographical location; and website content. Since we consider the geographical location of the visitor very important in the tourism analysis, whenever we judge appropriate, we cross the primary metric with a secondary metric, namely the country of visit source. The focus of our study are the individuals located in Portugal (selected by the IP address) that visited the website.

Findings

The number of online visitors¹ of Alentejo, between 2007 and 2012, are approximately 458 thousands originating a total of 574.166 visits². Analysing figure 1, we can see that they occur over the entire year, but the number of visitors is higher during the summer months, particularly July and August, and lower during the winter, which evidences the seasonality of domestic tourism. In 2012, we notice a peak of visits in the first months of the year that can be justified by the large restructuring in the website. Because of that, 2011 is the year, in the period of analysis, that presents a higher rate of seasonal amplitude, i.e., a greater discrepancy between the visits in high and low season months (Figure 1).

The Portuguese are those that frequently visit the website, approximately 76% of the visits are originating from Portugal, and the others came from others 161 countries, which evidences a great dispersion of the visitors. The main foreign countries in number

¹ Total numbers of unique visitors to the website.

² Total number of visits to the website.

of visitors are in Europe, mainly in Spain (8,3%), France (2,6%), Germany (1,8%) and United Kingdom (1,7%). Brazil (1,8%) and United States (0,83%) visitors also deserve a highlight (Table 1).

Regarding the cities of origin of Portuguese people that visit the Alentejo website, they came mainly from Lisbon (38,7%), Porto (8,8%) and Évora (5%). However, there are also a great number of visits from other Portuguese cities across the country (31,1%) (see figure 2).

The average duration of visit to the website is three minutes and twenty seconds, and the average of pages per visit visualized by the Portuguese is four, the second lowest value in Europe. In addition, it was also found that the bounce rate is 42,5%, i.e. of a total of 457 806 unique visitants, approximately 195 thousands visualised only one page of the website. The visits from new visitors reached about 348 thousands, while the visits arising from the returning visitors was almost 89 thousands, which means that the visitors who return to website are much less, approximately 1:4.

In relation to the source of traffic used by the Portuguese while accessing to the website, it was found that approximately 52% of traffic is originating from the Google search engine. The other visits to the website came mainly from referral (13%) and direct traffic to website (7,3%). Analysing the figure 3, by year from 2007 to 2012, we observed that the visits from other websites to Tourism of Alentejo, were always above the visits direct to the website, being accentuated in 2012. However, in that year the growing of the direct visits to the website (+277,3%) was greater than the large increase of visits (+147,2%). The visits came mainly from the addresses facebook.com; visitportugal.com; and pesquisa.sapo.pt.

Regarding the content searched by Portuguese, we observed that about 30% (about 176 thousands) of the visits focused on the homepage of the website, the other visits are in very dispersed areas, but, it is possible to observe a preference in relation to the following contents, by descending order: flowers festivity of Campo Maior; Reservoir and river beaches; Where to sleep; About us; Tourist information; Sun and Sea Tourism; What to do; and Events (in total almost 50 thousands of visits). In terms of Alentejo localities, the interests of Portuguese concentrated in pages with information about: Campo Maior; Comporta; Reguengos de Monsaraz; Odemira; and Ponte de Sor.

Conclusions

In this paper we have shown that the data from the Internet, namely from GA, about the movements of the Portuguese in the web through the Alentejo official tourism website can give us information, practically in real time, enabling us to characterise the profile of the visitor to the Alentejo destination. Our results show that Portuguese visit the website over the whole year, but with much more intensity during the summer

months. For most of them it is the first time that they came to the website, and come mainly to the website through the Google search engine. The visits occur from all the country, but mostly from the capital of Portugal (Lisbon) and surroundings, Porto and Évora. The visitor, in average, visualises four pages, stays approximately 3 minutes on the website, and almost 43% of them leave the site after seeing one page. The contents in higher demand are related to events, namely the flowers festivity of Campo Maior, tourist resources/products, like reservoir and river beaches and Sun and Sea, accommodations, and tourist information. In addition, we concluded that the Portuguese show more interest by the following localities in the Alentejo destination: Campo Maior; Comporta; Reguengos de Monsaraz; Odemira; and Ponte de Sor.

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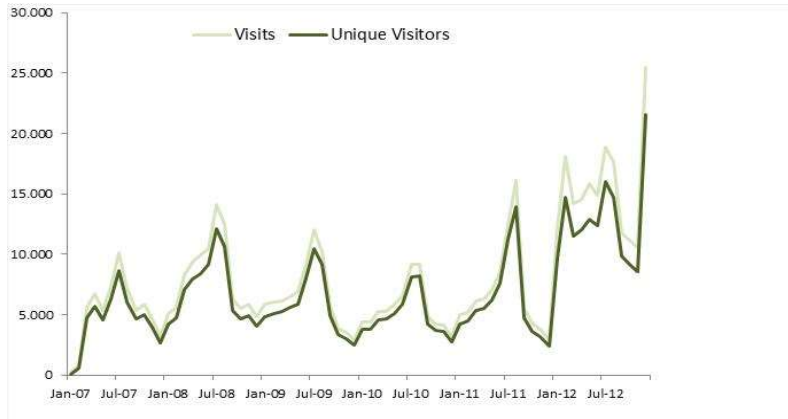


Figure 1. Unique visitors and visits to the website

Table 1

Top of visits to website by country

Countries	Visits	%
Portugal	435.790	75,9
Spain	46.674	8,3
France	14.740	2,6
Germany	10.351	1,8
Brazil	10.321	1,8
United Kingdom	9.942	1,7
Switzerland	6.820	1,2
Italy	6.531	1,1
Belgium	5.871	1,0
USA	4.745	0,8
Netherlands	4.724	0,8
Others	17.657	3,1
Total	574.166	100

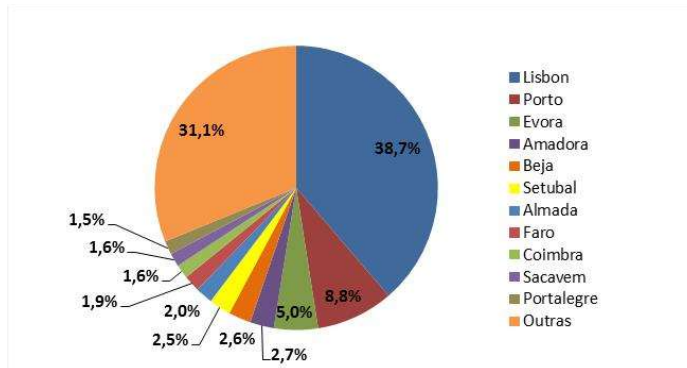


Figure 2. Visits to website by cities in Portugal

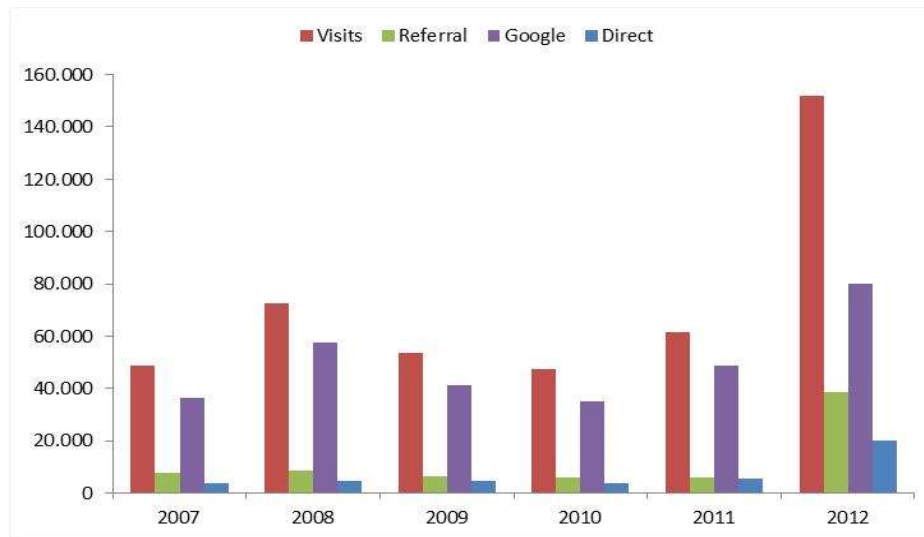


Figure 3. Visits to website by traffic sources