

A REVIEW OF WEBSITES 'SELLING' DENTAL TOURISM

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Abstract

The rise of dental tourism is a product of globalisation and it is a largely online phenomenon. The internet provides a platform on which all the key stakeholders connect; therefore, the internet based marketing channel is very significant for private dental clinics promoting their services to domestic and foreign patient-consumers. The purpose of this article is to present a review of dental clinics websites in order to explore the quality of information that prospective dental tourists are subjected to.

This approach mirrors a previous study that focused on the quality of information on the web pertaining to the five star hotels using the established guidelines of the Multi Medial Information Model. The entities and attributes were assessed for their suitability and applicability for the dental tourism context in Croatia. The research was conducted in November 2017 by quota sampling of 15 dental clinics in Croatia.

Results indicate that analyzed dental clinics websites generally performed poorly in providing information about medical and nonmedical requirements and content that highlights what forms their core business as very few of the entities which are presented in this study has a satisfactory extent.

Contribution of the article is in the selection of a topic which is modestly represented in the academic literature; thus to provide more adequate knowledge about the quality of dental tourism websites. Information about the quality of their websites could serve as a basis for dental clinics to refine their marketing strategies in order to lure international patients; thereby, reinforce their position on the dental tourism market.

Keywords Websites, Dental tourism, Dental clinics, Croatia

INTRODUCTION

The rise of dental tourism is a product of globalisation and it is a largely online phenomenon. A number of European tourist destinations acknowledged a high development potential of this form of tourism offer and are already taking advantage of its tourist and other resources in order to achieve numerous socio-economic benefits, as well as a higher level of recognition in the global health tourism market. In Croatia, inbound dental tourism is mostly provided by private dental establishments and more than half of those private practices are in Zagreb, Kvarner and Istria (Buneta, 2016, p. 62-63; Sečan, 2015, p. 29).

Numerous studies have tried to understand the experience of medical tourism and many have emphasized the role of the Internet (Riordain and McCreary 2009; Crooks, et al., 2011; Turner 2011). The Internet is used by dental clinics and travel agencies all around the world to advertise dental treatments to international patients. This involvement ranges from general information searches to the organisation of their entire dental tourism trip. Globalization and trends of product differentiation, force countries all

around the world to make their services as both attractive and unique; therefore, professional and cheap services alone are not enough to convince foreigners to seek dental services abroad. Singh (2017) finds that beside affordability and quality, access to information is still one of the most important pull factors among dental tourists because availability of reliable information facilitates decision making process (Moghavvemi et al., 2017).

Innovative an attractive Website design and the consistency of its content is necessary to avoid users becoming bored or confused and eventually aborting their attempt to view the information (Hasan and Abuelrub, 2011 p. 19). Multimedia is an efficient way of communicating information. It is a combination of two or more media such as sound, text, image, animation and video that is delivered interactively to the user providing information which concerns the selected option. Each multimedia element should be evaluated according to its contribution to the description of the specific entity.

Without a doubt, websites have become an significant source of information and a communication tool in dental tourism. High quality websites could attract more attention, contacts and visits by implying that their products are of high quality (Lončarić, Bašan and Jurković 2013, p. 266). This imposes the necessity to implement the latest promotion techniques and technology in order to reach potential patients and provide them with factual information with the purpose of gaining their trust.

However, despite of increasing popularity of dental tourism in Croatia, there is a modest number of studies exploring the dental tourism in scholarly literature. Furthermore, there is an overall lack of research on the quality of dental tourism websites in Croatia. In addition, unsubstantial attention is given to the presentational structure of the websites in the context of the availability, functionality, content and design. The consequence is the loss of relevant opportunities of providing quality information to potential patients which can stimulate a positive word-of-mouth recommendation.

The purpose of this article is to present a review of dental clinics websites in order to explore the quality of information that prospective dental tourists are subjected to.

Understanding the above, following research questions were addressed in this study;

1. Do Croatia's dental tourism Websites lack of a comprehensive and unique structure in terms of organization and content?
2. Can the previously established Multi Media Information Model be used to estimate the quality of dental clinic websites in Croatia?

By better understanding the importance of a comprehensive and unique website those who work in the sector of dental tourism and dental care services for inbound tourists, could be able to device more effective marketing strategies and service delivery to meet dental tourists' actual needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Growing number of patients are travelling abroad for economical dental treatment as the cost of the treatment is high, inadequate or unavailable in one's own country. This fast growing sector in the health industry where patients cross national borders seeking dental care has been popularly designated as dental tourism. It can be developed as a response to national policy changes, the expanding national alliances, and the opening of new low-cost routes (Lunt and Carrera, 2010, p. 473; Olipra, 2012, p. 55).

The internet provides a platform on which all the key stakeholders in dental tourism connect; therefore, the website based marketing channel is very significant for private dental clinics promoting their services to dental tourists that are coming from different countries in order to help them make decisions timely and effectively (Turner, 2012; Woo and Schwartz, 2014; Singh, 2017). Previous research on medical tourists information needs confirms that establishing trust between service providers and potential patients is very important; hence, dental clinic websites should demonstrate that their medical staff, facilities and treatments are as trustworthy as possible. Beside from the availability of information on medical staff, facilities and treatments; prices, international accreditations, location directions and guidelines, accommodation and transportation information, proximity of the destination, familiar language, additional information about a specific destination, available leisure activities, patient testimonials, ease in appointment scheduling and other enquiries, virtual tours of medical facilities, postoperative follow-up care have been studied and were considered important for patients (Zailani et al. 2016; Jappar et al. 2017; Helmy 2011; Chandu, 2015; Musa, 2011; Molina, Gómez and Martín-Consuegra, 2010; Barowman et al. 2010; Moghavvemi et al. 2017; Herrick 2007).

In the healthcare service sector, scholars have determined elements for assessing websites' effectiveness. According to Singh (2017, p. 1488) the medical tourism websites effectivity depends upon its information content, effectiveness of message delivery, design features and appeal, website service quality and website interactivity. Authors Jaković, Herceg and Vlahov (2010) used the content analysis method to analyze Croatian five star hotels websites. Marković et al. (2012) used the same method to evaluate the website of three, four and five star hotels in Croatia. Pranić, Garbin and Arnerić (2014) evaluated 197 hotel websites to determine whether hotels in Croatia, as an economically lagging transition country, exploit the potentials of the Internet as a marketing tool.

Authors Lončarić, Bašan and Jurković (2013) analyzed websites of specialty hospitals and spas in the Republic of Croatia and concluded that they do not fully use the potential of the Internet in their communication with the market. The analyzed dimensions were: contact information, general information about a hospital or spa, surrounding area information, facilities information, medical and wellness services information, booking information, communication, and social networks.

Authors Galičić and Šimunić (2010) developed an optimum model (MMIM) of a non-linear nature in order to determine preconditions of achieving enhanced performance on the tourist market. Authors outlined and illustrated an «optimum universal»

organizational structure (model) for Internet-based hotel presentation by the selection of the relevant elements that a MMIM, as an IS for Internet-based presentation, must contain. Authors established the following attributes as elements of MMIM; «Home Page + Menu», «Location», «Accommodation», «Food and beverages», «Recreation», «Other services», «Hotel staff», «Booking form», «Response/interaction form» and »Interesting links in the destination».

The above mentioned model was used as a platform for analyzing selected Croatian dental clinic websites, the research subject of this paper. Considering the findings of authors Galičić and Šimunić, seven categories were extracted which allow the assessment of the usability and content of websites belonging to private dental clinics promoting dental tourism.

PERFORMANCE OF ONLINE MARKETING IN DENTAL TOURISM

Methodology

The purpose of this article is to present a review of dental clinic websites in order to explore the quality of information that prospective dental tourists are subject to. The research was conducted in November 2017 by quota sampling of 15 dental clinics in Croatia listed in the web portal of the company «Bisnode» (specialized in producing high-quality business, credit and market information), as most successful according to their gross business income in 2016. This type of sample was chosen with the aim of demonstrating how did the most successful dental clinics develop their web-page content. Above mentioned dental clinics are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: **Selected dental clinics in Croatia by location, number of employees and Website**

	Name of the dental clinic	City	Web page	No. of employees
1.	Poliklinka Rident	Rijeka	https://rident.hr/hr	178
2.	Poliklinka Ars Salutaris d.o.o.	Zagreb	http://dental-cro.com/	30
3.	Stomatološka ordinacija Martinko	Zagreb	http://implant-centarmartinko.com/	34
4.	Poliklinka Identialia	Zagreb	http://www.identialia.hr	74
5.	Poliklinka Arena	Zagreb	https://www.arenapoliklinika.hr/	29
6.	Orto-nova d.o.o	Rijeka	https://www.orto-nova.hr/	35
7.	Poliklinka Jelušić	Opatija	http://www.jelusic.com	34
8.	Poliklinka Dubravica d.o.o.	Vodice	https://www.dcd.hr/	37
9.	Stom.ord. Dr. Živković	Rijeka	https://www.dentvitalis.com	20

	Name of the dental clinic	City	Web page	No. of employees
10.	Poliklinka Smile d.o.o.	Opatija	http://smile.hr/	31
11.	Poliklinka Šlaj-Anić	Zagreb	http://www.slaj-anic.com/	34
12.	Kalmar implant dentistry d.o.o.	Rijeka	http://www.kalmardent.com/	33
13.	Dental centar Bago i Božić d.o.o.	Zagreb	https://dendum.com	23
14.	Štimac d.o.o.	Zagreb	https://drstimac.com/	21
15.	Dentex d.o.o.	Zadar	https://www.dentex-croatia.com/	21

Source: Authors elaboration according to <https://boniteti.bisnode.hr>. (2016)

This approach mirrors a previous research conducted by authors Galičić and Šimunić (2010) that focused on the quality of information on the web pertaining to the five star hotels forming an optimum Multi Media Information Model) for Internet-based hotel presentation. The entities and attributes used in the above mentioned study were assessed for their suitability and applicability for the dental tourism context in Croatia. Seven entities were extracted and altered to suit the dental tourism context. The author verified the presence or absence of any data referring to each entity. Each entity was determined by attributes and variables and analyzed accordingly. In order to achieve the research objectives, a content analysis method of their websites has been applied. "Variable exists" indicated the existence of the content and "No variable" indicated that the content was not present. "Variable incomplete" indicated that the content is not fully and/or adequately presented. Descriptive statistics were used in subsequent data analysis. The following content of selected entities used as website performance evaluation criteria is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: **Contents of entities**

Entity 1	General data/information
Entity 2	Location
Entity 3	Physical features
Entity 4	Staff
Entity 5	Treatments and prices
Entity 6	Contact form
Entity 7	Links

The entities presented in Table 2 are further described by attributes and variables in the following chapter which examines the research results.

Data management and analysis

Table 3: Entity 1- General data/information

ENTITY 1 GENERAL DATA/ INFORMATION	ATTRIBUTES										
	Dental clinic's information							Information of dental clinic's immediate environment			
	Year of constructin	Number of employees	Number of dental offices	Languages spoken by staff	Multilingual website	Telephone number	Working hours	Official language	Official currency	Destination's time zone	Other information
Analysis of variables											
Variable exists	5	4	7	4	15	15	15	0	1	0	3
Variable incomplete	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
No variable	9	11	7	10	0	0	0	15	14	15	8

«Dental clinic information» and «Information on a dental clinic’s immediate environment», are the attributes of **Entity 1**. The purpose of this entity is to provide potential patients with general information about the dental clinic and its immediate environment. Results show the dental clinic websites have some of the researched content, but only the working hours and telephone number information is available on all of the websites. The variable «Multilingual website» is also satisfactory as all of the examined websites are multilingual, with English as the most common language. The state of other variables is unsatisfactory, especially «Year of constructin» (33%), «Number of employees» (27%) and «Languages spoken by staff» (27%). The variable «Number of dental offices» has a somewhat higher percentage with seven dental clinics websites which presented their dental offices number, which accounts for 47% of selected dental clinics.

The attribute «Information on a dental clinic’s immediate environment» is insufficiently represented on all of the websites, with missing information about the official language of the destination, official currency, time zone and other useful information that might be very important for patients to know before making a decision to visit a dental tourism destination.

Table 4: Entity 2 – Location

ENTITY 2 LOCATION	ATTRIBUTES							
	Location					How to reach us		
	Textual description of the location	Image of the clinic in the city	Image of the clinic surroundings	Exact address of the clinic	Google maps	Description of how to reach us	Transport providers (air, bus, train, vessel)	Other information
Analysis of variables								
Variable exists	3	4	6	15	15	8	4	5
Variable incomplete	6	1	1	0	0	0	3	0
No variable	6	10	8	0	0	7	7	10

Entity 2 refers to the attributes «Location» and «How to reach us. Analysis of the attribute «Location» shows that only the variables «Exact address of the clinic» and «Google maps» are presented in all of the websites, while variable «Textual description of the location» is present in 20% of the websites, «Image of the clinic in the city» in 27% and «Image of the clinic surroundings» in 40% of the websites; hence, attribute «Location» is not satisfactorily covered.

The attribute «How to reach us» is also poorly covered. Variables «Description of how to reach us» is presented in 53% of the websites, «Transport providers» in 27% and «Other information» in 33% of the websites. Potential patients searching for a dental clinic on its Web site via the Internet will learn very little about the dental clinic's location or how to reach it.

Table 5: Entity 3 – Physical features of the dental clinic

ENTITY 3 PHYSICAL FEATURES	ATTRIBUTES						
	Front desk		Dental office			General overview	
	Textual description of the front desk	Image of the front desk	Description of the dental office	Image of the dental office	Image of the view from the dental office window	Overview of facilities (general)	Virtual tour (video)
Analysis of variables							
Variable exists	1	8	4	10	5	7	8
Variable incomplete	0	2	6	1	2	6	0
No variable	14	5	5	4	8	2	7

Entity 3 provides information to potential patients wanting to see physical features of the dental clinic such as; images of reception, images of the dental offices and a general overview of the facilities through its Web site. Research results show that all three of the attributes of Entity 3 are poorly covered. The worst situation is concerning the variable «Textual description of the front desk». Analysis of the attribute «Front desk» shows that only one dental clinic has provided its Web site with a written description of their front desk, although half of the dental clinic Web sites display an image of the front desk (53%).

Attribute «Dental office», is covered to a relatively satisfactory extent as 10 clinics do have an image of the dental office, despite the fact that in most cases its description is nonexistent or incomplete. 67 % of the clinics don't display images of the views from the dental office on their website. The attribute «General overview» is satisfactorily covered in nearly half of the examined websites. 47% of the websites have a general overview of the facilities (mostly motionless pictures) and 53% of websites contain virtual tour video.

Table 6: **Entity 4 – Dental clinic staff**

ENTITY 4 DENTAL CLINIC STAFF	ATTRIBUTES					
	Doctors of dent.med.			Other staff		
	List of doctors of dental medicine	Photo of each doctor	CV of each doctor	List of employees	Photo of each employee	Job description of each employee
Analysis of variables						
Variable exists	11	13	8	9	8	5
Variable incomplete	2	0	0	3	5	5
No variable	2	2	7	3	2	5

The purpose of **Entity 4** is to create a sense of familiarity by providing potential guests with the possibility to learn about a dental clinic's staff over the Internet. The research results showed that almost all of the selected dental clinics provide such information on their Web sites. «List of doctors of dental medicine» is presented in 73 %, «Photo of each doctor » in 87% and «CV of each doctor» in 53% of the websites.

The attribute «Other staff» which contains variables «List of employees», «Photo of each employee» and «Job description of each employee» were for the most part, incompletely presented offering a photo and a job description just for certain employees.

Table 7: Entity 5 – Treatments and prices

ENTITY 5 TREATMENTS AND PRICES	ATTRIBUTES							
	Dental treatments			Other treatments		Prices		
	List of dental treatments	Images of treatments	Description of dental treatments	List of other treatments	Image of other treatments	Warranty	Price list of treatments	Payment methods
Analysis of variables								
Variable exists	15	11	14	3	5	8	7	10
Variable incomplete	0	4	1	2	0	0	0	0
No variable	0	0	0	10	10	7	8	5

Entity 5 provides potential patients with information regarding dental treatments and prices. Results show that only the attribute «Dental treatments» which contains variables «List of dental treatments» (100%), «Images of dental treatments» (73%) and «Description of dental treatments» (93%) are satisfactorily covered.

Considering that numerous dental clinics offer their patients other treatments beside dental treatments such as «Dermal fillers» or «Platelet-rich plasma» (PRP) for skin rejuvenation, attribute «Other treatments» was added to Entity 5. The state of the attribute «Other treatments» is unsatisfactory, particularly variable «List of other treatments» which is present in 20% of websites and variable «Image of other treatments» which is present in 33% of websites. Regarding attribute «Prices», half of the selected clinics do not display their price list (47%) and warranty conditions (53%) on their Website. Variable «Payment methods» (67%) is mostly satisfactorily covered.

Table 8: Entity 6 – Response/interaction form

ENTITY 6 RESPONSE/INTERACTION FORM	ATTRIBUTES						
	Contact form						Usage instructions
	Possibility of entering general data	Possibility of requesting a therapy	Possibility of adding files on the contact	Possibility of requesting an online	Possibility of making special requests	Possibility of choosing the type of response	Instructions for using the contact form
Analysis of variables							
Variable exists	15	14	11	14	15	1	1
Variable incomplete	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
No variable	0	0	4	0	0	14	14

By creating **Entity 6**, a dental clinic provides potential patients the opportunity of using a contact form through which a potential client could request an online therapy plan or an online quote by uploading their files on the dental clinic's Web site. Attribute «Contact form» provides satisfactory results. Almost all dental clinics allow patients the possibility of entering their personal data (100%), requesting a therapy plan online (93%), adding files on the contact form (73%), requesting an online quote (93%), making special request (100%).

Variable «Possibility of choosing the type of response» shows unsatisfactory results, because 14 dental clinics (93%) have failed to provide such possibility. Analysis of the attribute «Instructions for using the contact form» shows severely poor results, because just one of the selected dental clinics provided such instructions on their Web sites.

Table 9: **Entity 7 – Links**

ENTITY 7 LINKS	ATTRIBUTES								
	Destination links			Transport links		Supplier links		Other links	
	Hotels in the destination	Restaurants in the destination	Entertainment in the destination	Link to vessel service	Link to airport timetable	Dental clinic certificate providers	Dental clinics material /equipment suppliers	Dental clinics Social networks	Patient recensions
Analysis of variables									
Variable exists	3	0	0	4	3	4	3	13	13
Variable incomplete	2	1	0	0	0	5	8	0	0
No variable	10	14	15	11	12	6	4	2	2

Dental tourism with its interdisciplinarity imposes the necessity of linking and harmonizing all supply stakeholders within the entire destination chain; therefore, the purpose of **Entity 7** is to provide quality links which lead potential patients to useful information.

Attribute «Destination links» is extremely poorly covered. Only three clinics (20%) have presented promotional information on the accommodation and none of them presented hospitality services such as restaurants and entertainment at the destination. In the attribute «Transport links», only 20% of websites contain airport information and 27% contain a link to a vessel service which is also unsatisfactorily presented. Attribute «Supplier links» which contains variables «Dental clinic certificate providers» (27%) and «Dental clinics material /equipment suppliers» (20%) shows unsatisfactory results.

Attribute «Other links» which includes variables «Dental clinics Social networks» and «Patient recensions» shows much more satisfactory results with 87% of the examined websites providing links. Of all the available social networks, the clinics mostly use Facebook.

The mass of negativity within this entity indicates that Croatian dental clinics have been significantly unsuccessful in this part of their Internet-based presentation.

CONCLUSION

The website content analysis indicates that analyzed dental clinics websites generally performed poorly in providing information about medical and nonmedical requirements and content that highlights what forms their core business as very few of the entities which are presented in this study has a satisfactory extent. Hospitality services within the dental tourism destination are insufficiently advertised through dental clinic websites, which could be justified with the inadequate normative legislation acts on health services in tourism that would allow health and tourism to collaborate under the same umbrella term which is the hospitality industry.

Based upon findings of this paper, it can be concluded that there is a lack of a comprehensive and unique dental clinic website structure in terms of organization and content and that the potential of the Internet in the dental clinics communication with the market is not fully exploited. Comprehensive and unique website can help potential dental tourists coming from different countries to make their decisions timely and effectively. Acknowledging its importance for business, the Croatian dental service providers should focus more on the performance of their websites in terms of information content that prospective dental tourists are subjected to.

The entities and attributes of the MMIM, previously used in the evaluation of the performance of the five star hotels in the context of their web-page content, were assessed for their suitability for the dental tourism context in Croatia. Seven entities were extracted and altered to suit the dental tourism context and applied for the evaluation of the dental clinic website performance in Croatia; therefore, the previously established MMIM can be used to estimate the quality of dental clinic websites in Croatia.

Contribution of the article is in the selection of a topic which is modestly represented in the academic literature; therefore, to provide more adequate knowledge about the quality of dental tourism websites. Information about the quality of their websites could serve as a basis for dental clinics to refine their marketing strategies in order to lure international patients; thereby, reinforce their position on the dental tourism market.

Limitation of the research relies mostly on the size and structure of the sample as the dental clinic websites were the only object of the analysis; therefore, the results can not be generalized to the overall dental tourism websites in Croatia. Future research could cover a wider scope and include all establishments which are involved in the dental tourism in Croatia in order to evaluate their web-page content performance. In addition, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative analysis of dental tourism websites with other countries active in the dental tourism market.

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