

USE OF TWITTER BY NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Tamara Ćurlin^{1,*}, Mirjana Pejić Bach¹ and Ivan Miloloža²

¹University of Zagreb – Faculty of Economics and Business
Zagreb, Croatia

²Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Faculty for Dental Medicine & Health
Osijek, Croatia

DOI: 10.7906/indecs.17.1.20
Regular article

Received: 20 December 2018.
Accepted: 20 March 2019.

ABSTRACT

In the last few decades, National tourism organizations (NTOs) emerged into the critical institutions for the countries branding and identification worldwide. The increased relevance of the NTOs in the development of tourism of specific countries also increased their focus to Web 2.0. technologies and their social media prominence. The primary objective of this study purpose is to investigate the utilization of the social media profiles of the NTOs of European countries. In order to get comprehensive and systematized results, authors brought up three research questions: (i) what is the activity of NTOs according to social media utilization, (ii) what is the level of coherence among countries according to time of establishment and language of Twitter accounts of NTOs in European countries and (iii) is there relationship among Twitter activity of NTOs and country tourism activity? The study investigates the usage of social media by reviewing the official profiles of NTOs in the main social media channels, and subsequently extracted data from their Twitter accounts in order to establish the possible correlations among the NTOs' Twitter activities and countries' characteristics. Statistic software the Statistica is used as a tool to examine output data analytics. Distinctive knowledge emerged from the investigation, noteworthy both for scholars and adaptable for business. Research established that European countries NTOs have recognized the importance of social media and that most of NTOs actively use the combination of various social media in order to achieve their strategic goals. Relationships among activity on social media and tourism results have been confirmed. We provide examples of the best practices which can serve as a helpful strategy development models for the NTOs' practitioners. Finally, we outline the possible directions for further research in the area of social media utilization of NTOs.

KEYWORDS

tourism, social media, national tourism organizations, EU, social media analytics

CLASSIFICATION

JEL: O33

*Corresponding author, *η*: tcurlin@efzg.hr; +385 1 238 3280;
Faculty of Economics and Business, Trg. J. F. Kennedyja 6, HR – 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of social media in tourism is established and investigated by numerous authors worldwide. From its initial purpose as a tool for people to connect, social media shifted to an omnipresent technological concept that transformed overall business communication techniques [1]. As a result of social media expansion, users transformed into the media themselves in order to exchange knowledge, information, and experiences, which support development possibilities for various industries [2].

For the tourism and hospitality sector, there are numerous advantages from social media utilization. The whole travel circle has affected by the influence of the social media: it begins from vacation planning, destination, and products promotion, and expanded to decision making during the trip and becoming analytic data machine afterward [3].

Development of the Web 2.0. technologies and expansion of the e-WOM by the social media has an immediate impact on tourist destination reputation and encompasses all travel stages: before, during and after visiting destination [4].

The focus of this article is to explore the social media activity of official National tourism organizations (NTOs) of the 28 European Union country members. This investigation is exploratory and interpretative in nature, as it aims to answer three research questions disclosed. The questions together will consequently unveil the patterns and methods of how EU countries utilize social media in order to promote their countries. The research questions are set as follows.

RQ1: What is the activity of NTOs according to social media utilization?

RQ2: What is the level of coherence among countries according to the time of establishment and language of Twitter accounts of NTOs in European countries?

RQ3: Is there a relationship among Twitter activity of NTOs and country characteristics?

The article begins with the Introduction section which points out the relevance and objectives of the investigation. Next section is Theoretical background, which gives a brief literature overview on the topic. The Results section discloses different insights into countries and social media data. First, general tourist information as overnight arrivals and overall population about EU member countries were given. Furthermore, by content analysis of the web pages of the national tourism organizations (NTOs) of the countries, utilization of four most prominent social media was explored for each country. An extensive investigation is conducted on the Twitter data output, as the most distinguished microblog globally. Insights were extracted from the official Twitter accounts, and with the program software 'Statistica' the statistic analysis was performed. In the 'Discussion' section, answers on the three research questions were presented. Lastly, conclusion and the future research directions were pointed out.

BACKGROUND

NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

NTOs represent the key institutions for tourism development, branding, and marketing of the country [5]. Numerous factors are included in establishing NTOs' strategies and forms, such as size and culture, political, economic and social aspects of the nation [6].

NTOs bring together various players from the tourism industry [7]. They serve as the link for the private and public sector in terms of tourism and national promotion activities as they provide a connection among business suppliers and tourist services performance companies [8].

Various authors [9] assert that national branding, and its importance is equally relevant as the reputation of the companies and brands. However, branding procedures and strategies are not established as they are in the private sector and the companies due to the recent attention and awareness of the potential benefits of the matter.

Therefore, strategic planning combined with other activities emerged as the primary function of the NTOs [10]. Functions of NTO's are centered around systematic and long term promotion of the destination worldwide in order to achieve growth of the market share [11] and to establish 'a strong brand image with clearly identified and powerfully projected brand value,' [12].

OFFICIAL TOURISM MARKETING

NTOs' marketing tools and channels have excessively transformed since their first appearance at the beginning of the 20th century [13]. Initially, NTO's operated on the local level and expanded with the package holiday appearance and presence of the holiday brochure letters [14].

Holiday brochure and posters represented the most important and innovative mass tourism marketing thenceforth [15], till the point where usage of visual means was introduced [116]. Images of destinations with the follow-up promotion with guides included designed by NTOs' and Town Council promotion department served as a prevalent marketing tool used by NTOs' continuously until the emergence of the Internet [17].

Internet and technology development had a substantial impact on the whole tourism sector, the way travelers gather and exchange information, and consequently, on NTOs' functions and operations [18]. The principal challenge for NTO's was adapting to technological change, and this was the time when the first NTOs' web pages appeared [19].

The rise of the Web 2.0. technologies and social media impact brought great prominence to developing marketing strategies in tourism [20]. NTOs' placed social media in the center of their marketing operations which enabled the two-way communication with tourists, posting in real time, tracking traveler movement and decision making in a destination in goal to achieve a comparative advantage on the market.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM

Social media is one of the most significant phenomena of the present times, and its reshaping communication as we know it, at both personal and business level [21]. According to statistics from 2018 [22], there were about 2,46 billion social media users in 2017, which estimates at 71 percent of all internet users, and these figures are ever increasing.

One of the industries in which social media has significant influence is tourism and hospitality. Travel industry itself is experiencing growth every year and has become one of the most dynamic sectors for economic development and job creation [23]. Results highlight that tourism directly contributed 23 trillion US\$ in 2016, and indirectly '7.6 trillion \$ to the global economy, and supported 292 million jobs' [23]. The numbers equal to 10.2% of the world's GDP, and approximately 1/10 of all posts. Authors [24] confirm social media support this growth and that it is playing a dominant role in traveling, from planning, using social media in a destination, to sharing travel experiences [25]. Therewithal, researches [26] carry out that travelers not only exchange knowledge; they also share experiences through social media. These are not just facts about travel attributes such as information about the destination, attractions and weather conditions, but through posts on social media, they may additionally include imaginations, visions, and emotions about holiday features.

There is a big difference in how social media in tourism was used and how it has used today [27]. Experts [28] outlined that social media platforms enable travelers to initialize and share

online knowledge, emotions and experiences and experiential moments much broader than before which revolutionize primarily undisclosed and private experiences to global databases which can be interpreted and analyzed by tourism institutions and organizations.

Social media role in the travel industry surfaced from marketing tool for destination and product promotion to a system that enables to create market positioning, creating personalized supply and hence, gain competitive advantage.

The most prominent SM are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. With millions of users worldwide, they facilitate strong involvement from both the public and private sector [29].

Twitter, as the most popular microblog and is presenting what is going on in the world [30]. Twitter is the social media selected for the analysis considering its forceful relevance for the tourism industry as the main e-WOM generator and destination branding channel [31].

TOURISM ACTIVITY OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Tourism is the sector of high importance in the European Union due to the fact that the EU countries are the most visited globally with more than half of international arrivals [32]. Tourism generates one third all jobs and contributes its economic and strategic purposes [33]. The primary goal for the EU considering tourism is to attain the optimal balance of tourism activities in the member countries [34]. EU assize, quoted by the Coles et al. [35] state that: 'European tourism needs to be managed with foresight, proactively rather than retrospectively responding to change, with its managers more keenly sensitized to the regularity of enlargement events, adjustments in EU governance, economic and social reorganizations in existing and new member states, and the potential restructuring of markets'.

Tourism significance for EU is unquestionable. Yet, many fast-growing economies are attracting numerous travelers and decreasing market share from EU countries [36]. In fact, eight from ten most visited countries were not from the European Union, according to Business Insider [37].

In order to maintain their tourism championship status, EU countries must continually pursue scope for further growth, and economic development. The utilization of social media in order to expand their marketing strategies, and gain a competitive advantage is one of the most prominent and efficient strategies at the moment [38].

Figure 1 shows 28 EU countries and information on their population and nights spent in 2018. The most populated countries are Germany, the UK, and France, and the least populated countries are Estonia, Latvia, and Luxembourg. In most cases, high population follows high overnight rate and vice versa. Although, there are some exceptions, such as he Spain, which obtains the highest number of overnight stays (467 million) and is inhabited whit just 46 million residents. Moreover, France and Italy have significantly more overnights that are populated, and Croatia emerges as a country that Croatia has by far the most significant difference among population and nights spend. Furthermore, countries such as Poland and Romania show the distribution in favor of a population, with fewer tourists overnight. However, the lowest populated countries have the lowest tourism results as well.

RESULTS

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY OF EUROPAN NTOs

Table 1 outlines the social media appearance for 28 EU member countries.

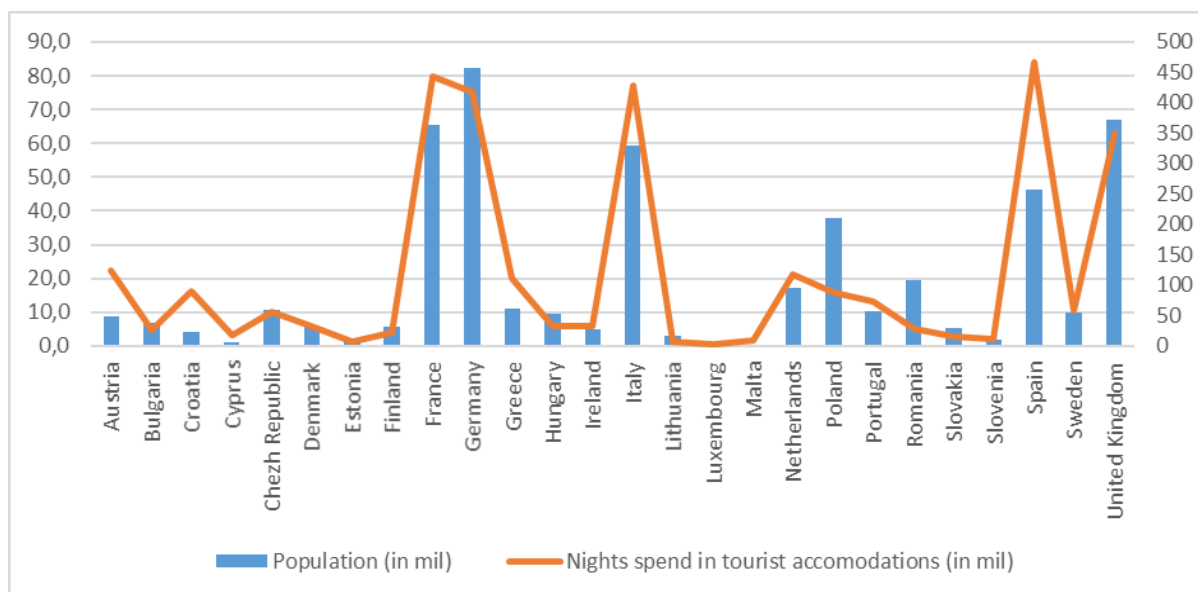


Figure 1. EU countries by populations and nights spent in tourism accommodation (2018, in mil). Source: authors' work, based on Eurostat data.

Table 1. Social media activity of NTOs of European countries. Source: authors' work.

Country	Twitter	Instagram	Facebook	YouTube
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✓
Belgium	∅	∅	∅	∅
Bulgaria	✓	∅	✓	✓
Croatia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyprus	✓	✓	✓	∅
Czech Republic	✓	✓	✓	✓
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✓
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Finland	✓	✓	✓	✓
France	✓	✓	✓	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greece	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	∅
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✓
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Latvia	∅	✓	✓	✓
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓	✓
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓
Malta	✓	✓	✓	✓
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓
Romania	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slovakia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spain	✓	✓	✓	∅
Sweden	✓	∅	✓	∅
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	✓

Facebook is the social media, which is the most, represented among EU countries, 27 of 28 European countries NTOs have an official Facebook account. Only Belgium does not have an official Facebook account due to the country's marketing strategy to promote three separate regions instead of the country as a unity. The fact that Facebook is the most used social media among EU countries is consistent with social media popularity. Records from January 2019, verify Facebook as the most used social network worldwide, with nearly 2,3 billion users [39]. Twitter and Instagram are the second disseminated network among European countries; only Belgium and Latvia are countries that have not created official accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY OF EUROPEAN NTOs

Twitter account languages and the date NTO of EU countries joined the Twitter network has been presented in Table 2.

Column 'Twitter account language' displays the language of the Twitter post on each official NTO account. Most account post on the English language in order to obtain a more far-reaching audience and being understood on the global level. However, Austria and Bulgaria came up as an exception: Austrian profile post on the German language and Bulgaria is

Table 2. Twitter account language and joining date for NTO EU countries. Source: authors' work.

Country	Twitter account	Twitter account language	Join
Austria	Österreich Werbung	German	09/2008
Belgium	-	-	-
Bulgaria	bulgariatravel.org	English/Bulgarian (Cyrillic)	06/2011
Croatia	Croatia full of life	English	06/2009
Cyprus	VisitCyprus	English	02/2009
Czech Republic	Visit Czech Republic	English	04/2009
Denmark	VisitDenmark	English	03/2009
Estonia	Visit Estonia	English	05/2009
Finland	Visit Finland	English	11/2009
France	France.fr	English	07/2009
Germany	Germany Tourism	English	11/2008
Greece	Visit Greece	English	09/2010
Hungary	WOW Hungary	English	04/2009
Ireland	Tourism Ireland	English	02/2012
Italy	Italia	English	10/2011
Latvia	-	-	-
Lithuania	Lithuania	English	01/2009
Luxembourg	Visit Luxembourg	English	12/2011
Malta	VisitMalta	English	05/2009
Netherlands	Meet in Holland	English	04/2011
Poland	Poland Tourism	English	06/2009
Portugal	Visit Portugal	English	08/2009
Romania	Romania Tourism	English	04/2009
Slovakia	Slovakia Travel	English	07/2011
Slovenia	Feel Slovenia	English	06/2009
Spain	Spain	English	12/2008
Sweden	VisitSweden	English	01/2009
United Kingdom	VisitBritain Biz	English	04/2010

posting some content on English, some on the Bulgarian language on Cyrillic alphabet. Austrian reasons could be the drive to preserve authenticity as a marketing strategy, which is their policy for all events that take place in their country. As for Bulgaria, posts on local language could be intended for the residents. The approach turns out favorable for Austria, as the number of their followers and tourism, but not so much for Bulgaria which scores low both in tourism both in Twitter popularity ratings.

The column 'Join' presents the dates for when each countries NTO joined the Twitter network. Twitter initially launched 13 July 2006, anyhow, its relevance for the tourism sector has been recognized and widely utilized since 2008 [30]. Austria NTO was the first one to establish an official Twitter account. That could be one more reason why the country created an account on national language. Many countries followed up shortly, with more than half of the official accounts (15 of 26) established in 2009. Only two countries besides Austria had Twitter since 2008, Germany and Spain. Last countries that created a Twitter account were Luxembourg, Italia, and Ireland, in late 2011, or at the beginning of 2012. The last country joined in February 2012, so all Twitter accounts are at least seven years active.

Spain is the country that emerged as with the strongest activity of their NTO's Twitter account among EU countries in the most categories included. As for the engagement categories: Tweets, Following, Events, and Multimedia, Spain emanates as the first or the second rated in the three of the four categories. That could be connected to the fact that Spain has the largest number of followers, among those countries included in the research, and is the second by likes of all the countries. Furthermore, Spain is not only the champion of the Twitter data results, is the country with the overall nights in EU, so the marketing strategy of the country could be taken as an example for developing models or frameworks. Withal, all countries rated highly in engaging categories, such as Portugal, Greece, Slovenia, and Italy, have more overnight stays than the population which implicates tourism success. Contrarily, countries with the lowest engagement, as Bulgaria, produce low tourism results.

TWITTER MEDIA ACTIVITY OF EUROPAN NTOs

Twitter activity across EU countries for NTOs' profiles are given in Table 3. Among European NTOs, 26 of 28 have their official Twitter accounts, except Belgium and Latvia. Belgium's tourism Twitter accounts are distributed in three regions: Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels. However, Belgium does not have a unique Twitter account at the national level. In addition, Latvia's NTO does not have a Twitter account at all, while Latvia has Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, and Youtube media.

The first column represents all countries that are members of the European Union. The second column shows the number of tweets of the given country. Tweets are 'text-based posts long of up to 140 characters available to account followers' [40]. Portugal NOT produced the largest number of tweets among all the European countries, followed by Spain and then Greece. Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria emerge as the European countries with the smallest number of tweets.

The third column indicates the number of followers followed by specific country. Spain, which also is the country with the most travelers overnight stays, is the most active in following other accounts. The second most active country by following is Slovenia, then Portugal. Bulgaria, Romania, and Estonia are the most passive in following other Twitter accounts, among the EU countries.

The fourth column shows the number of followers for the given NTOs' Twitter accounts. Spain has the highest number in the follower's category and represents the only country which has more than 300 million followers. Hungary NTO has the second largest number of followers, and Italian NTO is rated as the third. Countries that have the least followers for

their NTO accounts are Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Lithuania. Among them, the Bulgarian NTO has by far the least number of followers.

The fifth column represents how many likes each country has. The Czech Republic, Spain, and Germany have obtained the most likes from their followers. Oppositely Bulgaria, Malta, and Hungary have the least likes on their posts. The sixth column 'Lists/events' stage event announcements held in the country. Italy, Germany, and Denmark distinguish themselves from other countries by the number of events. The seventh column shows multimedia content on the country profiles. Multimedia content of the top three countries by publishing number, are mostly referring to the photos of the culture, architecture, history, and nature of the given country. Spain, Italy, and Greece publish mostly photos on their profiles, and Sweden, Austria, and Romania post the smallest number on their Twitter accounts.

Figure 2 shows the connection among the number of Tweets and total likes and followers, indicating the connection among three variables exists in most of the countries Twitter account.

The majority of the countries that have the largest number of tweets have also the largest number of followers. Tourism champions that like Spain, Greece, and Italy, subsume a high number of Tweets followed by the high level of followers.

Table 3. Twitter of European NTOs across countries. Source: authors' work based on Twitter accounts on EU countries.

Country	Number of Tweets	Following	Followers	Likes	Lists/Events	Multimedia (photo and video)
Austria	3199	343	15083	613	3	339
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bulgaria	1464	57	897	44	0	568
Croatia	11921	3076	103099	17006	1	3524
Cyprus	3659	1176	14890	489	0	1040
Czech Republic	13858	2321	33358	78825	0	5757
Denmark	11895	1416	74440	6079	11	4483
Estonia	2266	113	10367	2166	2	475
Finland	6482	731	65774	5229	1	1524
France	6393	1174	31592	4244	8	2239
Germany	14115	1096	14193	4521	11	4698
Greece	30653	1675	103745	17281	1	6742
Hungary	3324	173	291498	169	2	381
Ireland	21078	1279	105665	16487	6	5247
Italy	19415	1269	131606	10013	18	7294
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	2250	1312	3800	744	3	1288
Luxembourg	4654	1590	10457	10054	1	699
Malta	2273	213	29572	75	0	1858
Netherlands	9764	4079	5166	2014	5	2399
Poland	1453	714	16509	392	0	649
Portugal	91615	4805	89539	12090	70	6318
Romania	899	28	30779	4999	94	380
Slovakia	884	139	2475	1502	1	551
Slovenia	15220	5195	43949	13048	13	2845
Spain	43460	24345	315314	24376	11	28700
Sweden	2408	709	28494	187	2	192
United Kingdom	11058	970	15375	1092	7	1376

Ten of twenty-six countries included in the investigations have more followers than likes and tweets and achieve positive tourism results. However, there some outliers presented as well. For instance, Hungary has among the least number of Tweets and is the second-rated by the number of Followers. That could be connected with external influences, such as interest for the countries. Another outlier is Portugal which has an excessive number of Tweets but now followed by the followers. The Czech Republic is an example of inconsistencies as well with the high number of likes, and a lower number of followers. This relationship could be investigated with content analysis of the posts to explore the high engagement of the followers. Notwithstanding the outliers, the relationship among the variables given is unassailable, and the knowledge that excessive tweeting can influence on the popularity of the Twitter account can be useful for NTO's and companies.

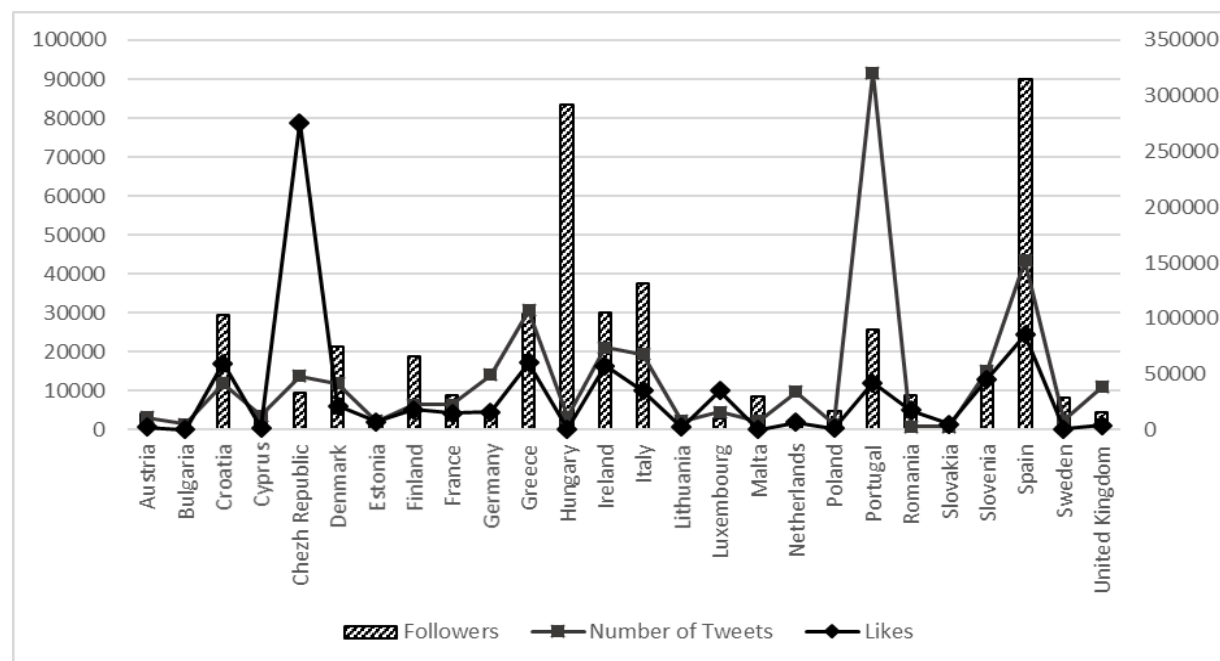


Figure 2. The Twitter activity of European NTOs. Source: authors' work.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWITTER ACTIVITY OF NTOs AND TOURISM ACTIVITY OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Table 4 and Figure 3. analytically and visually confirm the connection between tourism activity and Twitter account activity. As the preliminary research in this area, the correlation analysis of the following variables was conducted: 'Nights spend in tourism accommodations,' 'Number of Tweets,' 'Following,' 'Followers' and 'Likes'. Variable connections showed weak (0-0,25), medium (0,25-0,5) and strong correlation (0,5-0,75).

Outcome results confirmed the relationship among all variables included.

The variable 'Nights spent in tourist accommodation' is taken as a tourism success measure. The results indicate that all Twitter activity has a connection with the nights spent in the tourist accommodation in observed countries. The number of followers and the nights spent in the tourist accommodation have the medium correlation; and the number of tweets and the nights spent in the tourist accommodation show weak correlation. The fact confirms that both 'Tweets' and 'Following' are relevant variables measuring Twitter activity, while the 'Followers' and 'Likes' are relevant variables measuring Twitter account popularity. However, it could be premature to conclude that Twitter activity influences the tourist arrivals in a specific country. The example of Spain whose results came on top of both following,

Table 4. The relationship among tourism activity and Twitter account activity. Source: authors' work.

	Nights spent in tourist accommodation	Number of Tweets	Following	Followers	Likes
Nights spend in tourist accommodation (in mil)	1,000	0,230*	0,431**	0,302**	0,041*
Number of Tweets		1,000	0,488**	0,392**	0,268**
Following			1,000	0,622***	0,284**
Followers				1,000	0,179*
Likes					1,000

*weak correlation (0 – 0,25).

**medium correlation (0,25 – 0,5).

***strong correlation (0,5 – 0,75).

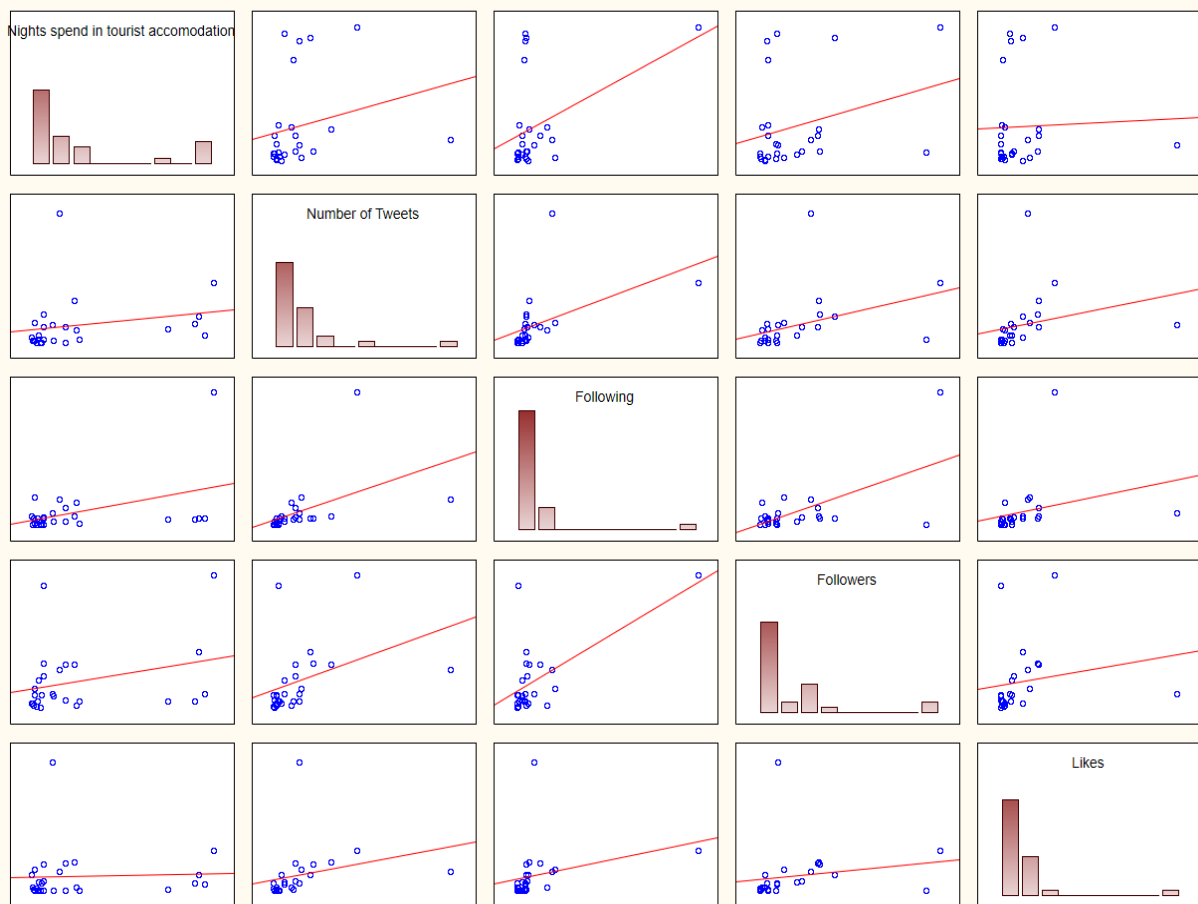


Figure 3. The relationship among tourism activity and Twitter account activity.

followers and nights spend in category indicates that this could be true. On the other hand, it is possible that countries with strong tourism activity also invest more in tourism marketing, and thus in social media marketing, specifically Twitter marketing.

Variable ‘Number of Tweets’ measures the activity of the Twitter account. It shows the medium-level correlation with all activity and popularity measures. That would presume that Twitter accounts who tweet more, also follow more different Twitter accounts and, therefore, produce more activity which positively correlates with popularity measures such as the number of followers and likes. The number of tweets category confirm the insights from Figure 2 which connects a number of tweets to the number of followers and likes. Both results imply that the higher engagement to the account, the higher popularity will result.

Variable 'Following' shows the strong correlation with the variable 'Followers.' The indication is that more the account follows other profiles and shows activity, it becomes more visible and is more engaging, so, consequently gains more followers. Furthermore, more popular accounts, which have more followers tend to engage even more, so they follow and post more often in order to get even better results.

Lastly, the variables 'Likes' and 'Followers' show a weak correlation. It is more likely that the NTO's EU country profile with more followers will also have more likes altogether.

Figure 3 supports the conclusion of Table 3. Scatter diagram shows the strongest correlation among Following and the Followers category. The second pair of variables with the strongest correlation is 'Following' and 'The number of tweets' variables. However, scatter diagrams indicate that substantial number of outliers is present among the given data and that the further research is needed in this area.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the research was to investigate social media activity of European NTOs', with the focus to Twitter utilization. By answering three research questions, the importance of social media has been pointed out, and the connection among social media activity and tourism results has been entrenched.

The first research question examined social media activity of NTOs of European countries. The majority of the countries observed have all four social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram). The analyzed confirmed countries awareness to the importance of social media utilization as the indispensable factor of nation's promotion and branding. The research outputted that more than 97 % of European countries use at least one social media and that over 93 % of NTO's actively use the combination of social media in order to reach a varied audience, spread WOM, and promote their tourism. Social media mechanisms substantiated as to the most powerful marketing and strategy channel nowadays.

Twitter evinced as the most useful social media in tourism sector because of its strong impact on the WOM and the possibility to shape tourism supply based on user preference extracted from Twitter. Many European countries recognized the benefits of Twitter for creating destination image and branding, as well as developing long term destination strategic plan based on Twitter utilization. Instagram has the main advantage in its wide popularity, plus the emerging number of travel bloggers who have the power to promote destination and influence users significantly.

Our results confirm the previous research, that social media uses among EU countries grew from 2012 when more than half countries did not have official accounts to nowadays when they are the omnipresent and far-reaching influential tool and the source of competitive advantage [41].

The second research question focused on the coherence among countries according to the time of establishment and language of Twitter accounts in European countries. It has been established that almost all countries post on the English language due to the goal of viral reach and comprehension. However, two countries post on local languages and alphabets, and looking at their overall results, they turned out lower than the average according to their Twitter NTOs' activity, so this could be considered as the possible reason. Most of the countries NTOs established their Twitter accounts not later than in 2012. Time of joining Twitter accounts could be associated with countries interest in tourism marketing development, but some of the European tourism champions like Italy and Ireland created their accounts later. Although both Ireland and Italy created their Twitter accounts later, they have nowadays more

tweets and followers than Austria and Germany, who created their accounts as the first. An explanation can manifest in the fact that all the countries created their account in a relatively short period and no country is considered as an outlier, so their outputs mainly depend on their engagement and activity and not on time of the account establishment.

Last research question investigated the possible relationship between Twitter activity and country characteristics. Results indicated the moderate correlation between Twitter activity and the tourism results for the European countries. Furthermore, the correlation between Twitter activities and the popularity of the specific profiles appeared. The strongest relationship in the correlation matrix was among ‘Following’ and the ‘Followers’ category, and the all other connection among ‘activity’ categories and ‘popularity’ of the account was confirmed. Therefore, the conclusion is that countries who engage more, tweet and post more, outcome better results and have more followers and likes. This is valuable knowledge for both the academy and practice as well.

In addition, cases of the best practice emerged, Spain turned out to produce among top three results in almost all categories, and all countries who engage and post frequently turned out to have more followers, and great tourism results in terms of overnight stays. On the other hand, countries having lower activity, in addition, produce lower results. Therefore, the conclusions of our research could be useful for the practice of the smaller countries, whilst investigation reported lower results in both tourism and Twitter outputs. Smaller countries should invest more in social media activities because of the word-of-mouth impact and the viral reach of social media. Croatia and Slovenia could serve as an excellent example of social media utilization in smaller countries [42]. This knowledge could serve both for researches and businesses to investigate more of the factor which impacts this correlation in order to generate new models to business strategies.

Limitations of the research are as following. First, the correlations among Twitter activity and tourism outputs are calculated based on the raw data on the country level, thus indicating that this research poses as the preliminary. Second, the causative and consecutive connections between Twitter activity of NTO and tourism activity in a specific country remains ambiguous, and further investigations should be focused to unveil if Twitter results impact on the tourism output. Moreover, instances that disclosed as ‘outliers’ can be valuable for future investigations as well. For instance, Chez Republic Twitter activity displayed a prevalent number of likes, and yet a number of followers which could be interesting for more comprehensive research of which factors implicate on the frequent engagement of followers, while their number remains lower.

APPENDIX

Table 5. Links to the NTOs’ Twitter accounts. Source: authors’ work (continued on p.238).

Country	Link to the NOT’s Twitter accounts
Austria	https://Twitter.com/austriatourism
Belgium	-
Bulgaria	https://Twitter.com/BGtravelOrg
Croatia	https://Twitter.com/Croatia_hr
Cyprus	https://Twitter.com/visitcyprus
Czech Republic	https://Twitter.com/VisitCZ
Denmark	https://Twitter.com/@GoVisitDenmark
Estonia	https://Twitter.com/visitestonia
Finland	https://Twitter.com/OurFinland
France	https://Twitter.com/UK_FranceFR

Table 5. Links to the NTOs' Twitter accounts. Source: authors' work (continuation from p.237).

Germany	https://Twitter.com/GermanyTourism
Greece	https://Twitter.com/visitgreecegr
Hungary	https://Twitter.com/wow_hungary
Ireland	https://Twitter.com/TourismIreland
Italy	https://Twitter.com/Italia
Latvia	-
Lithuania	https://Twitter.com/visitLithuania
Luxembourg	https://Twitter.com/luxembourginfo
Malta	https://Twitter.com/visitmalta
Netherlands	https://Twitter.com/meetinholland
Poland	https://Twitter.com/PolandtravelUS
Portugal	https://Twitter.com/visitportugal
Romania	https://Twitter.com/RomaniaTourism
Slovakia	https://Twitter.com/SlovakTB
Slovenia	https://Twitter.com/sloveniainfo
Spain	https://Twitter.com/spain
Sweden	https://Twitter.com/VisitSweden
United Kingdom	https://Twitter.com/VisitBritainBiz

REFERENCES

- [1] Leung, D.; Law, R.; Van Hof, H. and Buhalis, D.: *Social media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review*.
Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing **30**(1-2), 3-22, 2013,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2013.750919>,
- [2] Kaplan, A.M. and Haenlein, M.: *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media*.
Business Horizons **53**(1), 59-68, 2010,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>,
- [3] Litvin, S.W.; Goldsmith, R.E. and Pan, B.: *Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management*.
Tourism management **29**(3), 458-468, 2008,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011>,
- [4] Smallman, C. and Moore, K.: *Process studies of tourists' decision-making*.
Annals of Tourism Research **37**(2), 397-422, 2010,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.10.014>,
- [5] Morgan; M. and Ranchhod, A., eds.: *Marketing in travel and tourism*.
Routledge, 2009,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780080942957>,
- [6] Soteriou, E.C. and Coccossis, H.: *Integrating sustainability into the strategic planning of national tourism organizations*.
Journal of Travel Research **49**(2), 191-205, 2010,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0047287509336472>,
- [7] Buhalis, D. and Deimezi, O.: *E-tourism developments in Greece: Information communication technologies adoption for the strategic management of the Greek tourism industry*.
Tourism and Hospitality Research **5**(2), 103-130, 2003,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.thr.6040011>,

- [8] Lubbe, B.A.: *Tourism Management in South Africa*. Pearson Education, 2003, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7091-6027-5_35,
- [9] Anholt, S.: *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550086>,
- [10] Lennon, J.J., et al.: *Benchmarking National Tourism Organisations and Agencies*. Advances in Tourism Research. London, 2006, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-044657-8.50009-9>,
- [11] Dwyer, L. and Kim, C.: *Destination competitiveness: determinants and indicators*. Current Issues in Tourism **6**(5), 369-414, 2003, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500308667962>,
- [12] Ghodeswar, B.M.: *Building brand identity in competitive markets: a conceptual model*. Journal of Product & Brand Management **17**(1), 4-12, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10610420810856468>,
- [13] Pike, S. and Page, S.J.: *Destination Marketing Organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature*. Tourism Management **41**, 202-227, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009>,
- [14] Bunker, S.B.: *Consumers of Good Taste: 'Marketing Modernity in Northern Mexico, 1890-1910'*. Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos **13**(2), 227-269, 1997, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/msem.1997.13.2.03a00020>,
- [15] Pike, S.: *Tourism destination branding complexity*. Journal of Product & Brand Management **14**(4-5), 258-259, 2005, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10610420510609267>,
- [16] Harrington, H.J.: *The first among equals*. Quality Digest **6**, p.24, 1999, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823224685.001.0001>,
- [17] Baggio, R.: *A websites analysis of European tourism organizations*. Anatolia **14**(2), 93-106, 2003, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2003.9687019>,
- [18] Bizirgianni, I. and Dionysopoulou, P.: *The influence of tourist trends of youth tourism through social media (SM) & information and communication technologies (ICTs)*. Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences **73**, 652-660, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.02.102>,
- [19] Gretzel, U.; Fesenmaier, D.R.; Formica, S. and O'Leary, J.T.: *Searching for the future: Challenges faced by destination marketing organizations*. Journal of Travel Research **45**(4), 116-126, 2006, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0047287506291598>,
- [20] Neuhofer B.; Buhalis, D. and Ladkin, A.: *Conceptualising technology enhanced destination experiences*. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management **1**(1-2), 36-46, 2012, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2012.08.001>,
- [21] Balan, S. and Rege, J.: *Mining for social media: Usage patterns of small businesses*. Business Systems Research Journal **8**(1), 43-50, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/bsrj-2017-0004>,
- [22] Statista: *Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 (in billions)*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users>, accessed 5th May 2018,
- [23] World Travel & Tourism Council: *Travel & Tourism Global Economic Impact & Issues*. <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/2017-documents/global-economic-impact-and-issues-2017.pdf>, accessed 27th April 2018,

- [24] Buhalis, D. and Law, R.: *Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the internet – The state of e-tourism research*. Tourism Management **29**(4), 609-623, 2008, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.01.005>,
- [25] Fotis, J.; Buhalis, D. and Rossides, N.: *Social media use and impact during the holiday travel planning process*. Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism. Springer-Verlag, Vienna, pp.13-24, 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7091-1142-0_2,
- [26] Tung, W.V.S. and Brent Ritchie, J.R.: *Exploring the essence of memorable tourism experiences*. Annals of Tourism Research **38**(4), 1367-1386, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2011.03.009>,
- [27] Xiang, Z. and Gretel, U.: *Role of social media in online travel information search*. Tourism Management **31**(2), 179-188, 2010, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016>,
- [28] Munar, A.M. and Jacobsen, J.K.S.: *Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media*. Tourism Management **43**, 46-54, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.01.012>,
- [29] Boyd, D.M. and Ellison, N.B.: *Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship*. Journal of Computer-mediated Communication **13**(1), 210-230, 2007, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>,
- [30] Jansen, B.J.; Zhang, M.; Sobel, K. and Chowdury, A.: *Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth*. Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology **60**(11), 2169-2188, 2009, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/asi.21149>,
- [31] Ross, C.; Terras, M.; Warwick, C. and Welsh, A.: *Enabled backchannel: Conference Twitter use by digital humanists*. Journal of Documentation **67**(2), 214-237, 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00220411111109449>,
- [32] Ana, M.-I.: *Tourism industry in the new Europe: trends, policies and challenges*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence **11**(1), 493-503, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/picbe-2017-0053>,
- [33] Croes, R.; Ridderstaat, J. and van Niekerk, M.: *Connecting quality of life, tourism specialization, and economic growth in small island destinations: The case of Malta*. Tourism Management **65**, 212-223, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.10.010>,
- [34] Mayer, M.; Zbaraszewski, W.; Pieńkowski, D; Gach, G. and Gernert, J.: *Cross-Border Politics and Development in the European Union with a Focus on Tourism*. In: *Cross-Border Tourism in Protected Areas*. Springer, Cham, pp.65-84, 2019, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-05961-3>,
- [35] Coles, T. and Hall, D.: *Tourism and European Union enlargement. Plus ça change?* International Journal of Tourism Research **7**(2), 51-61, 2005, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jtr.512>,
- [36] UNWTO: *UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2018 Edition*, <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284419876>, accessed 7th December 2018,
- [37] Business Insider: *The most visited cities in the world in 2018*, <https://www.businessinsider.com/most-visited-cities-in-the-world-2018-9#11-seoul-south-korea-1013-million-international-visitors-10>, accessed 7th December 2018,
- [38] Grant, R.M.: *Contemporary strategy analysis: Text and cases edition*. John Wiley & Sons, 2016,

- [39] Statista: *Global social networks rated by number of users*.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users>,
accessed 7th December 2018,
- [40] Boyd, D.; Golder, S. and Lotan, G.: *Tweet, tweet, retweet: Conversational aspects of retweeting on Twitter*.
In: *Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. IEEE, pp. 1-10, 2010,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1109/hicss.2010.412>,
- [41] Hays, S.; Page, S.J. and Buhalis, D.: *Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations*.
Current Issues in Tourism **16**(3), 211-239, 2013,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2012.662215>,
- [42] Ćurlin, T.; Jaković, B. and Strugar, I.: *Analytics of Social Media: Perspective of Country Tourism Office*.
2018 ENTRENOVA Conference Proceedings,
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3282677>, accessed 7th December 2018.