

Chapter 12

Assessing the Accessibility of Tourist Destination Promotional Information: The Case of Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have analysed the accessibility level of information sources used by persons with disabilities when making tourism-related purchases. Consequently, the main objective of this chapter is to gain insights into whether Destination Management Organisations are actively developing inclusive destination promotion and advertising materials. To accomplish this, an exploratory study was conducted, with a specific focus on the tourism of Portugal. Portugal was chosen as the subject of the study due to its recognition by the World Tourism Organisation as the world's first accessible tourism destination. This recognition encompasses various aspects, including the official promotional tourism website (visitportugal.com), which features digital brochures. It is important to note that the exploratory nature of this study limited the ability to make direct comparisons with previous research. However, for future investigations, it is recommended that the framework employed in this study be applied to assess the accessibility of promotional materials from other DMOs and tourism stakeholders.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the global population of people with disabilities exceeds 1 billion, accounting for approximately 15% of the world's population (WHO, 2021). The percentage of accessible tourists, defined as individuals with disabilities, varies significantly depending on the type of disability and country. When considering a broader definition of accessible tourists to include older adults or those with temporary mobility limitations, the overall percentage of the population with accessibility needs while travelling is even higher. For instance, the baby boomer generation in many countries represents a substantial and growing demographic of older adults who may require specific accessibility provisions when travelling (UNWTO, 2019). This highlights the importance of ensuring that tourist destinations are accessible for persons with disabilities (PwDs), as they constitute a significant portion of the tourist market. Nevertheless, much work still needs to be done to prioritise accessibility in the tourism industry.

Travelling with a disability requires extensive planning. Even though PwDs frequently select locations closer to home when planning a vacation, they still require accurate information on accessible facilities and services (Eichhorn et al., 2008). The level of information needed increases with the degree of disability (Buhalis, n.a.), affecting PwDs' willingness to participate in the travel planning process and make reservations. Unfortunately, information specifically tailored to PwDs is often lacking. If PwDs had access to the necessary information, it is estimated that about 50% of this demographic would travel more frequently because they would have knowledge of available accessible facilities and services (Buhalis, n.a.; Lonely Planet, 2020a, 2020b). The Internet serves as an important and primary source of information for PwDs; therefore, it is imperative for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to develop adequate information channels and use online platforms to communicate destination accessibility effectively. This can be accomplished through the creation of user-friendly websites, the provision of detailed accessibility information, and the promotion of accessible tourism options through social media platforms. Moreover, DMOs can collaborate with organisations for PwDs to ensure the accuracy and suitability of the information provided for this segment.

Despite the significance of accessible tourism, only a few studies have analysed the accessibility level of the information sources utilised by PwDs when purchasing tourism-related products (Mills, A. et al., 2008; Mills, J. E. et al., 2008; Vila et al., 2018). Thus, the primary objective of this chapter is to examine whether DMOs develop inclusive destination promotion and advertising information. To achieve this, an exploratory study was conducted with Tourism of Portugal, the country's national DMO, analysing the accessibility of online brochures. Portugal was chosen as the subject of this study because the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has distinguished it as the world's first accessible tourism destination (UNWTO, 2021), namely its official promotional tourism website (VisitPortugal.com). Although the exploratory nature of this study limits direct comparisons with previous research, the analytical framework can be applied to other DMOs and promotional materials within the tourism industry in future investigations.

The structure of this paper is as follows: firstly, a review of the literature on accessible tourism is provided, followed by an examination of the accessibility of tourism information, specifically focusing on the information provided by official tourism destination websites. Subsequently, the methodology employed in this study is described in more detail. Finally, the research findings are reported and discussed, along with their implications for future research in the field.

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