The appearance of digital dynamic visual identities in the marketing of tourist destinations

Balázs Fekete
PhD Student, Corvinus University of Budapest, Marketing Institute
Kitti Boros
Assistant Lecturer, PhD Student, Corvinus University of Budapest, Marketing Institute

Cite as:
Fekete Balázs, Boros Kitti (2022), The appearance of digital dynamic visual identities in the marketing of tourist destinations. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 51st, (108171)

Paper from the 51st Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 24-27, 2022

The appearance of digital dynamic visual identities in the marketing of tourist destinations

Abstract

Visual communication for business purposes is an important and constantly changing field in marketing, its relevance is now indisputable in both economic application and science. Our research in Designcommunication (DIS.CO) addresses a special group of dynamic visual identities (DVIs) used in tourism: the growing phenomenon of digital DVIs. Our qualitative analysis examines cases of destination DVI where some form of digital operation appears: it takes shape in visual brand identities created in a generative, interactive, or data-driven manner. In this study, we explore the characteristics, benefits, and challenges of tourist destinations with a dynamic visual identity. Our goal is to highlight the importance and potential of using digital DVIs in tourism, as their use can greatly support brand owners in gaining the trust of tourists and increasing brand value. We analyzed 46 visual case studies from the past 20 years to gather insights on how innovative digital processes can improve the destinations' communications.

1. Introduction

Tourism falls under the most vulnerable industries worldwide. Following the dynamic growth of international tourism, the previously highly prosperous sector suffered drastic losses in 2020 as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic (Abbas, Mubeen, Iorember, Raza, & Mamirkulova, 2021; Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Countries around the world have introduced strict restrictions to ease the epidemic, and after the gradual opening of borders, millions of people who had been locked in their homes until then set out to seek new cultural tourism experiences. Culture proved to be indispensable even during the epidemic, and although visits to cultural destinations were not possible due to travel restrictions, their viewing culminated in virtual tours (UNWTO, 2021). Virtual tours used to consist of simple panoramic photos but advances in technology have allowed the emergence of new types of interactive features that researchers have been urging for use on tourism websites since the early 2000s (Cho, Wang, & Fesenmaier, 2002; Doolin, Burgess, & Cooper, 2002; Fotakis, & Economides, 2008). The spreading of virtual visits will decrease as the epidemic eases, yet these innovative tools will help to target cultural tourism for those who have previously had not been able to or had had difficulties in doing so, such as people with disabilities or elderly people living with permanent disabilities (Lu, Xiao, Xu, Wang, Zhang, & Zhou, 2021).

Digital technology contributes to the development of tourist destinations; however, virtual tours (VTs) cannot replace the socio-economic benefits of personal visits. The tourism of the future must contribute to the survival of the cultural sector, strengthening the cultural identity and brand of tourist destinations. There is a need to review and redesign destination marketing practices applied in the pre-COVID era, as the pandemic has changed not only the supply side but also the attitudes and travel habits of tourists. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) ensure the cultural destinations to revolutionize their offering and to co-create services dynamically with their visitors (Buhalis, & Foerste, 2015).

In our study, we present the method of qualitative research after discussing the relevant theoretical background from the fields of tourism and dynamic visual identities. In addition to scientific input, our research also includes practical suggestions for implementing innovative approaches in destination branding in the future. Thus, with the involvement of local residents, tourists or other stakeholders, digital visual identities can be created in a way that carries the external and internal values and unique features of the target area. When communication appears integrated into development, we can call it as Designcommunication or DIS.CO as well (Cosovan, 2009; Cosovan & Horváth, 2016; Cosovan et al., 2018).

2. Theoretical Context

2.1 Experience Seeking in Tourism

As a result of new international trends at the beginning of the third millennium, the number of experienced tourists has increased, who, in other words, have had a variety of experiences. Visitors are no longer satisfied with watching events only passively, but also want to take an active part in these novel and first-hand experiences (Hsu, Cai, & Li 2009; Li, & Cai 2012; Lunardo, & Ponsignon 2019; Su, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Tran, 2020). In the 21st century, a transformation appeared in cultural tourism, the essence of which is that tourist attractions also contribute to the individual or collective physical, mental or emotional transformation of tourists. Transformation has the potential to deliver social, cultural and environmental development in the long term. The development of cultural tourism based on the concept of transformation requires a new methodological approach and application by consumers, entrepreneurs and political decision-makers, as well (Vidickienė, Vilkė, & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2020). As a result of the change in consumer attitudes that has been further accelerated by the pandemic, the generation of experience is becoming a central element in the success of tourist attractions. Innovation is the key, as only through continuous renewal can tourist destinations remain competitive (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman, & Scott, 2009). Cities are important sites for cultural tourism, many of which have faced the phenomenon of overtourism. Although the problem of destination overcrowding due to the pandemic seems to be temporarily resolved, it will again be an important issue in the future. The causes of this phenomenon are still disputed, but destinations are making serious efforts to lure tourists back as soon as unrestricted leisure travel is possible again. It is certain that tourism development must use tools to help break down territorial concentration.

2.2 Tourism and Digital Solutions

The introduction of new ICTs and the advancement of new production methods, foreign investment and multinational companies have accelerated the process by which the world has become a 'global village' (McLuhan, 1962). The term was coined by McLuhan (1962) and he stated that the electronic communication will unite the world (Rao, 2019). In this global village (Var, Schlüter, Ankomah, & Lee, 1989) through the application of modern information technologies, interactivity and the active involvement of the consumer in the process of service - knowledge transfer, entertainment - is becoming an easier task. In our experience-seeking society, visitors will choose destinations that offer the opportunity to generate personal experiences. The tourism sector is characterized by continuous renewal.

The advancement of the achievements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has facilitated the emergence of a number of new tourism services based on digitization and offering authentic experiences. Technological advancements accelerate the value co-creation at the micro and macro-societal level in tourism (Buhalis, Harwood, Bogicevic, Viglia, Beldona, & Hofacker, 2019).

Trends in destination development have also been greatly amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past two years, industries have faced unprecedented challenges, with epidemiological measures (such as physical restraint, restrictions on leisure relocations) in the sub-sectors of the tertiary sector, including tourism, leading to a significant recession. Despite the economic downturn, technology has evolved tremendously during the pandemic and consumers have acquired new information technology skills. The COVID-19 catalyzed a rapid and massive deployment of emerging technologies (such as drones, artificial intelligence, robots) (Zeng, Chen, & Lew, 2020) and Extended Reality in tourism (Kwok & Koh, 2021). Extended Reality (XR) is an umbrella term that covers Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), Augmented Virtuality (AV), Mixed Realities (MR), and other immersive technology (Milgram, & Kishino, 1994). The use of various, primarily virtual solutions (e.g. augmented reality AR) to optimize consumer outreach (e.g., marketing activities, information provision) also play a key role in improving the consumer experience (Kounavis, Kasimati, & Zamani, 2012).

2.3 Dynamic Visual Identities

Our focus within the area of tourism marketing is on the dynamic visual identities representing destinations in which digital characteristics and processes takes shape. There are various definitions of DVIs, and the terminology of the literature is fragmented as well. DVIs are identified as mutant, flexible (Kreutz, 2001), flexible (Felsing, 2009; Hollington 2011), fluid (Pearson, 2013) and dynamic (Jochum, 2013; Murdock, 2016; Martins et. al., 2019; Nes, 2012) visual systems used in branding and communication. DVIs are tools "that use multiple variations resulting from the change of one or more elements of their visual identity system" (Martins, 2019, p.10). To address even the most important characteristics of such tools, the following criterion was added by us: dynamism must go beyond the purpose of inducing visual heterogeneity. Dynamism and the creative strategy leading to it should be closely related to an important changing feature of the entity represented or to a contextual attribute associated with it. Within the category of DVIs we were looking for a specific subset, the ones that can be related to digitalization in some way. This property can be approached by

looking for the generated, informative, participatory, and reactive features described by Martins et al. (2019).

The appearance of DVIs within tourism is not a brand-new phenomenon, early adopters of this visual communication concept in branding utilize the diverse features and opportunities provided by dynamism in visual systems from the early 2000s. The trend of using DVIs in place marketing became popular in the 2010s: metropolises like New York City[1], Melbourne[2] and Sydney[3] introduced such visual branding strategies to increase brand value and communicate in an innovative manner. Prevalence and importance of DVIs within tourism has grown over the years, for example LA28[4] Organization adopted this approach for the 2028 Olympic Games held in Los Angeles.

3. Methodology

With the rise of digital solutions within tourism and destination marketing combined with the past global digitalization and virtualization trends there may be a huge opportunity for future application of digital DVIs on this field. We aimed to acquire insights on what kind of possibilities can be extrapolated from existing designs and case studies. Since it is more important in this case to get a glimpse of what could be done rather than what was feasible to this point, we were including DVIs from competitions, tenders, and designer's portfolios as well as identities in use to collect a wide scope of examples that can serve as inspirative basis for future practical implications and discussion. We can say that our approach was like arts-based research, since "Good arts-based research ought to generate questions worth asking and ideas worth pursuing" (Eisner, 2006 p. 17).

To discover these kinds of possibilities, our research question was: What are the unique features of digital DVIs used in destination marketing? The unit of observation was visual and textual case studies. We utilized snowball sampling method starting from previous literature and performed thorough online keyword search on the most relevant portfolio sites to collect potential sample elements. As a result, we found 212 tourism related items, that we filtered down to N=46 valid cases that met the definitions and were covered by scope of the research. To shed light on the peculiarities we were interested in, qualitative content analysis (QCA) was applied. With the participation of an independent external expert (professional graphic

---

[1] Nes, 2012
[2] https://landor.com/rebranding-the-city-of-melbourne
[3] https://www.forthepeople.agency/work/city-of-sydney
[4] https://la28.org

designer) the contents of the case studies were coded. By systematic analytical procedure we sought to draw conclusions about the patterns inherent in the content. The results were compared against the triple relation-system suggested by the guidelines of DIS.CO[5] development process: it was an assessment of 1. Material – Immaterial qualities, 2. Permanent– Variable relations, 3. presence of Survival – Subsistence – Development related contents.

4. Major Results

4.1 Digital co-operation and generative contribution

Visual identity co-creation is a strategy how digital DVI systems can provide added value for different stakeholder groups. The extent of participation can vary largely: it is possible to involve different segments of the target audiences and grant opportunities of elaboration and active participation of forming the visuals. It seems that this can be done directly or indirectly, although it is important that the participants recognize their own contribution or at least comprehend that they are able and authorized to shape the end results with their behavior and actions. This approach can help gaining unique and first-hand experiences that guests and visitors are looking for to satisfy their needs (Hsu, Cai, & Li 2009; Li, & Cai 2012; Lunardo, & Ponsignon 2019; Su, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Tran, 2020). We also found cases where only a closed group of internal stakeholders were involved and supported with generative digital tools to enable performing their everyday communication tasks. One of the most recent cases is the DVI of Oslo[6], Norway, where more than 50.000 of the city's employees can access and use the generative applications to create new and authentic designs representing the destination. According to the description of the case the city had large costs before using the DVI: "[It…] cost the municipality over $5 million each year to maintain all the different logos and identities" (Creuna, 2019), thus, the question arises as to what economic implications the introduction of such a digital DVI may have.

---

[5] DIS.CO – Designcommunication is a patented design and development method invented by Attila Cosovan in 2009. As a research and innovation approach it is propagated by the Marketing-, Media-, and Designcommunication Department at Budapest Corvinus University. The products designed with this method received several RedDot Design Awards so far. For further insights see: Cosovan, 2009; Cosovan & Horváth, 2016; Cosovan et al., 2018.
[6] See designs: behance.net/gallery/79088903/City-of-Oslo-Identity, Creuna (2019)

4.2 The open-source DVI system

Another valuable digital solution to enrich the visual communication of destinations is to develop and provide an open-source DVI toolset for the stakeholders. This way many service providers and local individuals can also be representatives and builders of the brand. In cases like this, the question of motivations and control arises: why and how will the actors use toolset to communicate their own narratives of the destination. This empowerment of the local communities makes the DVI more than a branding asset, it can convey different stories and messages stitched together with the consistent visual language of the destination. A great example for this is the DVI of West Coast Tasmania[7]: "…the region can convey a coherent narrative and regional style, whilst maintaining the individual personality of each town, business or initiative. As an open-source identity system, every aspect is free to use by locals in the region, providing the tools to communicate effectively" (For The People, 2018). As the quote exemplifies, the themes of costs and effectivity and personalization is present in cases like this. The first two are important from a business standpoint, the latter is related to authenticity and image management. By using widely available and customizable dynamic visual systems, destinations can express their complex identity and many facets in a changing way with the help of the aspect of many actors. This capability of relatively cost-effective continuous renewal can lead to remain competitive (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman, & Scott, 2009) and by the usage of digital DVIs, it can be imported to the virtual spaces as well.

4.3 Beyond the boundaries of visuality

As one of the first users of a digital DVI concept, Nordkyn[8] peninsula in Norway makes use of weather data in a generative approach to bring its logo to life. Data visualization is a common method in business intelligence nowadays to provide easy access to complex Big Data. The reason why we cite it here is the indirect appearance of information on sensory perceptions originating from this cold and windy area. This synesthesia of the relation between touch (heat sense) and visuals is a poetic way of expressing a destinations unique quality. Similar happens in the case of a study project created for Nantes[9], where multiple soundscapes from the neighborhoods of the city are represented with graphical marks and colors. The introduction of more senses into the communication experience of a destination brand is something that is technologically possible using AR, AV, MR and theoretically

---

[7] See designs: https://www.behance.net/gallery/71882185/West-Coast-Tasmania, For The People 2018
[8] See designs: https://neue.no/work/visit-nordkyn, Nes (2012)
[9] See designs: https://www.behance.net/gallery/17181959/Flexible-identity-for-the-city-of-Nantes

founded by the sensory identity construct (Bartholmé & Melewar, 2011). With the help of Big Data and Industry 4.0 products as tools used by digital DVIs, destinations would be able to provide immersive, multisensory experiences beyond the boundaries of audio-visuality and even analogue reality. Interestingly we haven't found any examples yet that utilize these concepts this way.

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The marketing communication of tourist destinations needs to be renewed; tourist destination branding has an important role in tourism marketing. At first, the visual identity of a tourism brand typically meant only a few elements and a logo, which is the iconic marker of the destination (Beritelli & Laesser, 2018). Due to the increasing visual nature of the communication space and the development of technology, today's most innovative destination brands are using creative strategies to connect with their audience that accommodate some form of digital operation. Visual appearance can not only serve the recognizability and distinctiveness of the brand but can also induce emotional attachment and increased elaboration through networking. Possible tools for this are digitized operation, automation, or data-driven visual communication that is an integral part of the design or application process. A communication strategy needs to be based on active tourist participation through social media (Stojanovic, Andreu, & Curras-Perez, 2018), which can be advocated by using DVIs.

The common point of experience-maximizing AR solutions is that in addition to new visual stimuli, they can also contribute greatly to the knowledge of tourists (tom Dieck, Jung, & Rauschnabel, 2018). DVIs have not connected with AR-based solutions yet, this connection will be the next step of the development in the future. AR-based tourism services also contribute to the development of digital skills of digital immigrants and embody the foundations of modern, digital (paperless) and sustainable tourism for digital natives (generation Z consumers). AR-based attraction development has been at the forefront since the mid-2010s, but the COVID-19 pandemic has forced service providers to change virtual paradigms more widely (Mohanty, Hassan, & Ekis, 2020). It should be added, of course, that the cost of AR-based solutions is very high, so that only destinations with a larger consumer base can benefit from this form of tourism for the time being. However, it is important that small towns also embrace virtual competition, and with some of their services, they must create the opportunity for an AR-based experience that will be the primary driver of modern tourist satisfaction in the next decade. After the connection of DVIs and AR-based solutions will be recommended to conduct a survey among the tourists about their satisfaction.

6. References

Abbas, J., Mubeen, R., Iorember, P. T., Raza, S., & Mamirkulova, G. (2021). Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on tourism: transformational potential and implications for a sustainable recovery of the travel and leisure industry. *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, *2*, 100033.

Bartholmé, R. H., & Melewar, T. C. (2011). Remodelling the corporate visual identity construct: A reference to the sensory and auditory dimension. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(1), 53–64.

Beritelli, P., & Laesser, C. (2018). Destination logo recognition and implications for intentional destination branding by DMOs: A case for saving money. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *8*, 1-13.

Buhalis, D., & Foerste, M. (2015). SoCoMo marketing for travel and tourism: Empowering co-creation of value. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *4*(3),151-161.

Buhalis, D., Harwood, T., Bogicevic, V., Viglia, G., Beldona, S. & Hofacker, C. (2019). Technological disruptions in services: lessons from tourism and hospitality. *Journal of Service Management*, *30*(4), 484-506.

Cho, Y-H., Wang, Y., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2002). Searching for experiences: The web-based virtual tour in tourism marketing. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, *12*(4), 1–17.

Cosovan, A. (2009). DISCO. Co&Co Communication.

Cosovan, A., & Horváth, D. (2016). Emóció–Ráció: Tervezés–Vezetés: Designkommunikáció. *Vezetéstudomány-Budapest Management Review, 47(3)*, 36–45.

Cosovan, A., Horváth, D., & Mitev Ariel, Z. (2018). A designkommunikáció antropológiai megközelítése. *REPLIKA, 106(1–2)*, 233–245.

Creuna (2019*). City of Oslo Identity.* https://www.behance.net/gallery/79088903/City-of-Oslo-Identity (Last accessed: November 20, 2021)

Doolin, B., Burgess, L., & Cooper, J. (2002). Evaluating the use of the Web for tourism marketing: A case study from New Zealand. *Tourism Management*, *23*(5), 557–561.

Dwyer, L., Edwards, D., Mistilis, N., Roman, C., & Scott, N. (2009). Destination and enterprise management for a tourism future. *Tourism Management*, *30*(1), 63-74.

Eisner, E. (2006). Does Arts-Based Research Have a Future? *Studies in Art Education*, 48(1), 9–18.

Felsing, U. (2009). D*ynamic Identities in Cultural and Public Contexts*. Zurigo: Lars Müller Publishers.

For The People (2018). *West Coast Tasmania.* https://www.forthepeople.agency/work/west-coast-tasmania (Last accessed: November 20, 2021)

Fotakis, T., & Economides A. A. (2008). Art, science/technology and history museums on the web. *International Journal of Digital Culture and Electronic Tourism*, *1*(1), 37–63.

Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 1–20.

Hollington, S. (2011). Flexible Visual Identity Systems.

Hsu, C., Cai, L., & Li, M. (2009). Expectation, Motivation, and Attitude: A Tourist Behavioral Model. *Journal of Travel Research*, *49*(3), 282–296.

Jochum, E. (2013). Dynamic Branding: How flexible design systems turn brands into dynamic visual identities. Zurich University of the Arts, Zurich, Switzerland. (Thesis)

Kounavis, C. D., Kasimati, A. E., & Zamani, E.D. (2012). Enhancing the tourism experience through mobile augmented reality: challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Engineering Business Management*, *4*, 1-10.

Kreutz, E. de A. (2001). *As principais estratégias de construção da Identidade Visual Corporativa.* Porto Alegre: PUCRS.

Kwok, A. O. J., & Koh, S. G. M. (2021). COVID-19 and Extended Reality (XR). *Current Issues in Tourism, 24*(14), 1935-1940.

Li, M., & Cai, L. (2012). The Effects of Personal Values on Travel Motivation and Behavioral Intention. *Journal of Travel Research 51*(4), 473–487.

Lu, J., Xiao, X., Xu, Z., Wang, C., Zhang, M., & Zhou, Y. (2021). The potential of virtual tourism in the recovery of tourism industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1–17.

Lunardo, R., & Ponsignon, F. (2019). Achieving Immersion in the Tourism Experience: The Role of Autonomy, Temporal Dissociation, and Reactance. *Journal of Travel Research*, *59*(7), 1151–1167.

Martins, T., Cunha, J. M., Bicker, J., & Machado, P. (2019). Dynamic Visual Identities: From a survey of the state-of-the-art to a model of features and mechanisms. *Visible Language*, 53(2), 4–35.

McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy: Making of the Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Milgram, P., & Kishino, F. (1994). A taxonomy of mixed reality visual displays. *IEICE TRANSACTIONS on Information and Systems*, 77(12), 1321–1329.

Mohanty, P., Hassan, A., & Ekis, E. (2020). Augmented reality for relaunching tourism post-COVID-19: socially distant, virtually connected. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes, 12*(6), 753-760.

Murdock, J. E. (2016). *Fluid Identity: History & Practice of Dynamic Visual Identity Design*. Kent State University.

Nes, I.V. (2012). *Dynamic Identities: How to create a living brand.* BIS publishers.

Pearson, L. (2013). Fluid marks 2.0: Protecting a dynamic brand. *Managing Intell. Prop.*, 229, 26.

Rao, P. S. (2019). The role of English as a global language. *Research Journal of English*, *4*(1), 65-79.

Stojanovic, I., Andreu, L., & Curras-Perez, R. (2018). Effects of the intensity of use of social media on brand equity: An empirical study in a tourist destination. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, *27*(1), 83-100.

Su, D., Nguyen, N., Nguyen, Q., & Tran, T. (2020). The Link between Travel Motivation and Satisfaction towards a Heritage Destination: The Role of Visitor Engagement, Visitor Experience and Heritage Destination Image. *Tourism Management Perspectives 34*, 100634.

tom Dieck, M. C., Jung, T. H., & Rauschnabel, P.A. (2018). Determining visitor engagement through augmented reality at science festivals: an experience economy perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *82*, 44-53.

Var, T., Schlüter, R., Ankomah, P., & Lee, T.-H. (1989). Tourism and world peace: The case of Argentina. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *16*(3), 431-434.

Vidickienė, D., Vilkė, R., & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, Z. (2020). Transformative tourism as an innovative tool for rural development. *European Countryside*, *12*(3), 277-291.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2021). *Inclusive Recovery Guide – Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19, Issue 2: Cultural Tourism*. https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284422579 (Last accessed: November 20, 2021)

Zeng, Z., Chen, P.-J., & Lew, A. A. (2020). From high-touch to high-tech: COVID-19 drives robotics adoption. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–11.