

Analysis of the Digital Communication of Central European Shrines

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Introduction

Religious tourism and marketing

Over time, the concept of religious tourism has expanded beyond traditional pilgrimages to include a broader range of activities and destinations, encompassing both spiritual and secular motivations. Religious tourism is growing rapidly and is becoming a significant segment of the global tourism industry, attracting millions of visitors annually (Iliev, 2020; Zlatanov & Popesku, 2021). Visitor motivations are multifaceted, including spirituality, faith, piety, cultural and heritage interests, curiosity, discovery, and relaxation. Even religious pilgrims are not a homogeneous group, with varied motivations and experiences (Kim, Kim & King, 2020). This relates to the four evolutionary typecasts of pilgrims suggested by Damari and Mansfeld (2016): traditional self-centered pilgrims, modern pilgrims, postmodern pilgrims, and post-postmodern pilgrims, with an increasing level of individualism, secularism, and more diverse cultural interactions. Triantafyllidou et al. (2010) identified the types of travelers to religious destinations in a range from pious pilgrims to secular tourists.

Nowadays, pilgrims, whether frequent or occasional, are not typically ascetics seeking solitude from worldly distractions. While some view hardship as part of the pilgrimage experience, modern pilgrimages have become more accessible and comfortable due to competition and service development. Pilgrims now often seek crowded, lively places rather than solitude (Reader, 2013). Contemporary Christian pilgrims often seek entertaining experiences and spiritual renewal, contrasting with the traditional focus on asceticism and supernatural pursuits. The evolving demands of modern pilgrims pose challenges for sacred site management, necessitating a shift from traditional to modern practices (Enongene & Griffin, 2017).

According to Faq (2022), marketing religious and spiritual tourism requires a holistic approach that integrates market segmentation, relationship marketing, and experiential strategies. The five types of spiritual tourism experiences identified by Norman (2012) are healing, experiment, quest, retreat, and collective. These experiences can be aligned with elements of experiential tourism to create effective relationship marketing strategies. Relationship marketing focuses on trust, promise fulfillment, exchange, and communication among all partners. Key Elements for successful relationship marketing are the following (Faq, 2022):

- *Product*: destination assets and the experiences they offer;
- *People*: individuals interacting with tourists, such as travel agents, guides, and religious leaders;

- *Collaboration*: both vertical and horizontal partnerships among various stakeholders, including transport companies, hotels, and religious institutions.

Chang, Li, and Vincent (2020) focused on developing a reliable and valid scale to measure the experiences of pilgrimage tourists. They identified five dimensions of pilgrimage experiences: spirituality, learning, physicality, help, and unpleasantness. Pilgrimage marketers should focus on life-changing elements and provide support for coping with negative emotions to enhance tourists' experiences. Additionally, managing unpleasant aspects of the pilgrimage experience can help improve overall satisfaction.

Digital and online marketing

As introduced by Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2017), marketing has evolved through three stages: from product-centered (1.0) to consumer-centered (2.0), and now to human-centered (3.0), where consumers are viewed as whole human beings with mind, heart, and spirit. The future of marketing focuses on products, services, and company cultures that embody human values. Marketing 4.0 integrates online and offline interactions and combines machine-to-machine connectivity with personal touch, aiding marketers in navigating the digital economy. It emphasizes the coexistence of digital and traditional marketing.

The terms digital marketing and internet/online marketing are slightly different (Storm, n.d.). Digital marketing is a broad term that describes a set of marketing strategies that use digital channels to promote your products or services. This term is an umbrella term that describes anything that uses a digital platform for marketing (including TV ads, digital billboards, radio spots, SMS texts, etc.) Internet marketing, also known as online marketing, is a subset of digital marketing that includes strategies to market online. Internet marketing focuses on building a presence on the web.

Online marketing provides an unlimited amount of information and the ability to combine various forms of content, including text, graphics, video, and audio, creating a rich and engaging user experience. One of its significant advantages is the instant update capability, ensuring that information is always current. A key benefit of online marketing is its facilitation of two-way communication, allowing businesses to interact directly with customers, fostering strong relationships. The lack of geographical restrictions and unlimited user access means businesses can reach a global audience without the constraints of time and location. Moreover, expanding the audience incurs no additional costs, making it a cost-effective strategy compared to traditional marketing methods. By securing the goals of both the seller and the buyer, online marketing creates a mutually beneficial environment (Negi & Chaurasia, 2021; Prokopenko et al., 2019).

ICT provides a significant competitive edge to tourism and hospitality businesses. It facilitates better customer relationship management, improves operational efficiency, and enables innovative marketing strategies. ICT innovations bring together various stakeholders within tourism ecosystems, fostering collaboration and enhancing the overall service quality (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014). Buhalis (2019) emphasizes the evolution from traditional tourism to eTourism and smart tourism. eTourism involves the strategic use of ICT to improve the management and marketing of tourism services, enhancing the competitiveness of destinations. Smart tourism leverages technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and artificial intelligence to create intelligent environments that offer personalized and real-time services to tourists. In the realm of internet marketing communication within the hospitality industry, the key elements can be identified as follows: information technology, such as the internet, online tools, and mobile devices; individuals and organizations like hotels and guesthouses; customers (guests and visitors); and internet users as potential customers. Just like in the physical marketplace, the virtual

market also seeks balance on both supply and demand sides. Therefore, internet marketing messages in the hospitality industry should adhere to these principles, aiming not only to sell products or services but also to adopt a more customer-friendly approach and enhance the online experience for users searching for travel and accommodation information (Semerádová & Vávrová, 2016).

Prats et al. (2015) highlighted the growing, though still limited relationship between new technologies and religion, noting that while religion has not fully embraced the digital age, it is beginning to do so. Six major areas where ICTs can intervene in religious tourism were listed by Amaro, Barroco, and Fonseca (2022):

- *Enhance tourists' experience*: ICTs provide pre-visit and on-site information, improving satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits. Technologies like AR, VR, QR codes, and apps offer interactive and multilingual experiences, and analyzing online reviews helps tailor services to tourist needs.
- *Promote religious tourism*: websites, social media, and other digital tools are cost-effective for marketing religious events, attracting diverse visitors, and obtaining donations for site maintenance.
- *Facilitate accessible tourism*: ICTs facilitate tourism for people with disabilities through specialized apps and virtual tours, enhancing independence and dignity for visitors with special needs.
- *Ensure sustainable tourism*: ICTs reduce signage and paper usage by providing digital information, and virtual tours decrease the physical impact on religious sites affected by over-tourism.
- *Provide safety*: technologies like electronic bracelets and cyberpilgrimages enhance safety by providing personal and medical information during emergencies and allowing virtual participation in dangerous locations.
- *Advance religious tourism research*: tracking devices and other tools help researchers and site managers understand tourist behaviors, optimize site management, and prevent overcrowding, though they raise privacy concerns.

Websites

Webpages play a crucial role for religious tourists in planning their trips, serving as the primary source of information about sacred sites. They provide necessary details and images for travel planning, significantly influencing destination choices (Amaro et al., 2022). Additionally, websites enable virtual pilgrimages, allowing individuals to experience the divine and engage with sacred sites interactively from home. This concept, termed "cyberpilgrimage" by Hill-Smith (2009), offers benefits such as 24/7 availability, inclusivity, no cost, unrestricted viewing of shrines, and safety from potential disasters.

Websites are crucial for a company's digital strategy, enhancing connectedness, competitiveness, and global reach. Effective online business management is essential. Website quality, though widely studied, lacks a universally accepted measurement. Herrada-Lores et al. (2022) identified three main dimensions of website quality: service quality, technical/system quality, and content/information quality. (See Table 1.)

Given that most tourists gather information from various online sources, it is crucial to identify their unique characteristics. No and Kim (2015) identified five attributes for tourism-related websites: accessibility, security, information–trust, interaction, and personalization. (See Table 1.)

As outlined by Prokopenko et al. (2019) destination website has two primary goals: to generate initial interest in the destination for potential tourists and to provide comprehensive information for those who decide to travel there. This helps increase the length of stay and the spending of tourists. The site's structure and content should align with the destination's marketing strategy, focusing on target audiences and representing key attractions effectively. See Table 1 for the essential information to include on the site.

For evaluating the satisfaction of online travel information by self-guided tourists, criteria were empirically identified by Li, Wang and Huang (2020). The five most mentioned (31–89.7%) criteria related to information content on the webpage were the following: comprehensive information, accuracy, empirical, conciseness, clarity. The two criteria related to functions on the webpage: convenience, comprehensive function. (See Table 1.)

Based on the questionnaire research of Zywiolok, Rosak-Szyrocka and Santos (2023), the attributes that are relevant for visitor satisfaction of the websites of the places visited by pilgrims and that can be objectively judged can be selected. (See Table 1.)

An important aspect of both the analysis of the design of the websites and the information available about the shrine is accessibility for people with disabilities: websites should be usable by users with different disabilities, e.g. visually impaired, hearing impaired, mentally impaired (Kirkpatrick et al., 2023; Domínguez Vila et al., 2017, 2018; Eusébio et al., 2021; Kołodziejczak, 2019) and should provide detailed information on the physical accessibility of the tourist sites (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2013; Casais & Castro, 2021; Kołodziejczak, 2019). There are significant gaps in these criteria in the online presence of tourism service providers (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011; Casais & Castro, 2021). See the criteria considered in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples for general and specific criteria relevant for pilgrimage places' webpages by different scholars

Scope & source	Attribute/criterion	Definition/description
Main dimensions of website quality (Herrada-Lores et al., 2022)	Service quality	Assesses the level of service provided from an external, subjective perspective, including user interaction and technical characteristics.
	Technical/system quality	Evaluates content presentation, access speed, ease of use, interface, and navigation from both an internal, objective perspective and an external, perceptual view.
	Content/information quality	Focuses on the relevance, sufficiency, accuracy, and timeliness of information, considering corporate, transactional, and communicational content from both objective and subjective viewpoints.
Attributes for tourism-related websites (No & Kim, 2015)	Accessibility	The extent to which travelers can easily access and use online tourism information sources.
	Security	The extent to which a website can demonstrate itself to be trustworthy regarding the protection of a user's personal information.
	Information–trust	User perception of the level of trust associated with information provided by the sources.
	Interaction	Facilitates immediate actions such as real-time feedback and active communication.
	Personalization	The ability of a user to obtain specific or perfect information to meet their needs.
Essential information to include on destination websites (Prokopenko et al., 2019)	Unique aspects of the destination	main attractions
	Tourist activities available	names, descriptions, visiting conditions, and benefits, addressing tourists' needs
	Transportation options	to reach the destination, with links to relevant transport companies
	Accommodation details	addresses and brief descriptions of hotels
	Useful arrival tips	such as car rentals and currency exchange
Criteria for evaluating the satisfaction of	Comprehensive information	The web page provides a wealth of diverse and complete information that users need.

online travel information by self-guided tourists (Li, Wang & Huang, 2020)	Criteria related to information content on the webpage	Accuracy	The information on the web page is accurate and error-free, which is consistent with the real situation.
		Empirical	The web page provides information related to the author's (sic!) personal experience.
		Conciseness	The information content on the web page is not redundant.
		Clarity	The information content on the web page is clear and easy to read.
	Criteria related to functions on the webpage	Convenience	The functions on the web page are easy to use.
		Comprehensive function	The functions provided on the web page are complete.
Attributes developed by pilgrims as customers (selected) (Zywiolek, Rosak-Szyrocka & Santos, 2023)			Places of worship and pilgrimage should have profiles on social media.
			The site of the place of worship should contain an easy-to-use search engine.
			The site and place of worship should have a map of how to navigate around the site.
			The place of worship prepares information about meeting places and accommodation points.
			The place of worship has other typically tourist attractions.
			The website should contain accurate contact details, a location pin, an access map, and entry markings.
			Information about the services and products offered should be complete and their photos legible.
			It is necessary to indicate the places of purchase of souvenirs, devotional items.
			Pastoral points are marked with function and time.
			The pilgrim should be able to choose from a variety of payment methods.
		Making a donation can take a different form of payment and currency.	
Information about accessibility for people with disabilities (required prior to travel) (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011)			Outdoor areas of the accommodation/attraction
			Moving inside the building
			Common areas of accommodation/attraction
			Security policy of the accommodation/attraction
		Accessibility of rooms	
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 – Principles (Kirkpatrick et al., 2023)	Perceivable	Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.	
	Operable	User interface components and navigation must be operable.	
	Understandable	Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.	
	Robust	Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.	

Source: own editing based on Herrada-Lores et al. (2022), No & Kim (2015), Prokopenko et al. (2019), Li, Wang & Huang (2020), Zywiolek, Rosak-Szyrocka & Santos (2023), Buhalis & Michopoulou (2011), Kirkpatrick et al. (2023)

Social media

Social media can be defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Social media has a significant impact on businesses and suggests a paradigm shift in marketing (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Social media marketing is the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software is to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value for an organization’s stakeholders (Tuten & Solomon, 2015). To leverage social networking sites effectively, businesses must choose appropriate marketing content to strengthen customer relationships, which in turn drives sustainable performance (Wibowo et al., 2020). Compared to traditional media programs, which are often costly, social media marketing strategies are generally more budget friendly. Regardless of costs, not engaging in social media marketing appears unwise (Silva, Duarte & Almeida, 2020).

According to Wang et al. (2017), an organization's technological, operational, managed, and strategic levels which must be aligned with each other to provide the maximum value from the use of social media to develop marketing activities (Silva, Duarte & Almeida, 2020). Effing and Spil (2016) distinguished three stages of maturity for social media strategy development, which can be considerable for religious site managements too: initiation phase (choosing channels, defining target audience); diffusion phase (establishing policies, setting goals, allocating resources); maturity phase (monitoring, scheduling content activities).

Tourists use social networking sites for various purposes, including gathering travel information, offering travel tips, making social connections, and enjoying the process of sharing their travel experiences with others (An et al., 2022). From the businesses' perspective, social media can assist them in engaging potential tourists and enhancing their online presence (Zlatanov & Popesku, 2021; Amaro et al., 2022). Religious tourism benefits utilizing social media to promote destinations and programs efficiently. Recommendations and reviews on social media significantly influence tourists' travel planning and decisions. In religious tourism, social media serves as a crucial information source and facilitates electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) about sacred sites and events. Religious tourists heavily rely on e-WOM, particularly from previous visitors, making it an essential tool for planning, especially for first-time visitors. (Amaro et al., 2022)

As stated by Peters et al. (2013), to manage social media effectively, managers and researchers must understand how marketing inputs interact with these channels to achieve desired outcomes, following the Stimulus>>Organism>>Response model, where, marketing inputs are stimuli like information and advertising, social media represent the organism, and managerial outcomes are the responses, which include metrics such as customer lifetime value or brand awareness. Social media encompass four key elements: motives, content, network structure, and social roles and interactions. The element of "content" can be categorized into three aspects: (1) content quality, subsuming content characteristics (e.g., interactivity, vividness), content domain (e.g., education, entertainment, information), and narrative styles; (2) content valence, subsuming emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, joy) and tonality (e.g., positive, negative); and (3) content volume, subsuming counts and volumes. This approach is well suited for the (mainly content-based) analysis of social media communication in religious sites.

Material and methods

The aim of the research was to analyze the digital communication of eight Roman Catholic shrines (Figure 1) in Central Europe, mainly from the point of view of serving pilgrimage tourism. As a subset of digital marketing, the focus was on the online marketing of the shrines, i.e. website, social media activity, video sharing (webcams, live streams). The method of the study was content analysis of these online platforms. The set of criteria for analyzing the websites of shrines as the main sources of information was based on the literature, with only objectively judged elements, without subjective criteria. For the websites, the criteria for the information content and services considered desirable were:

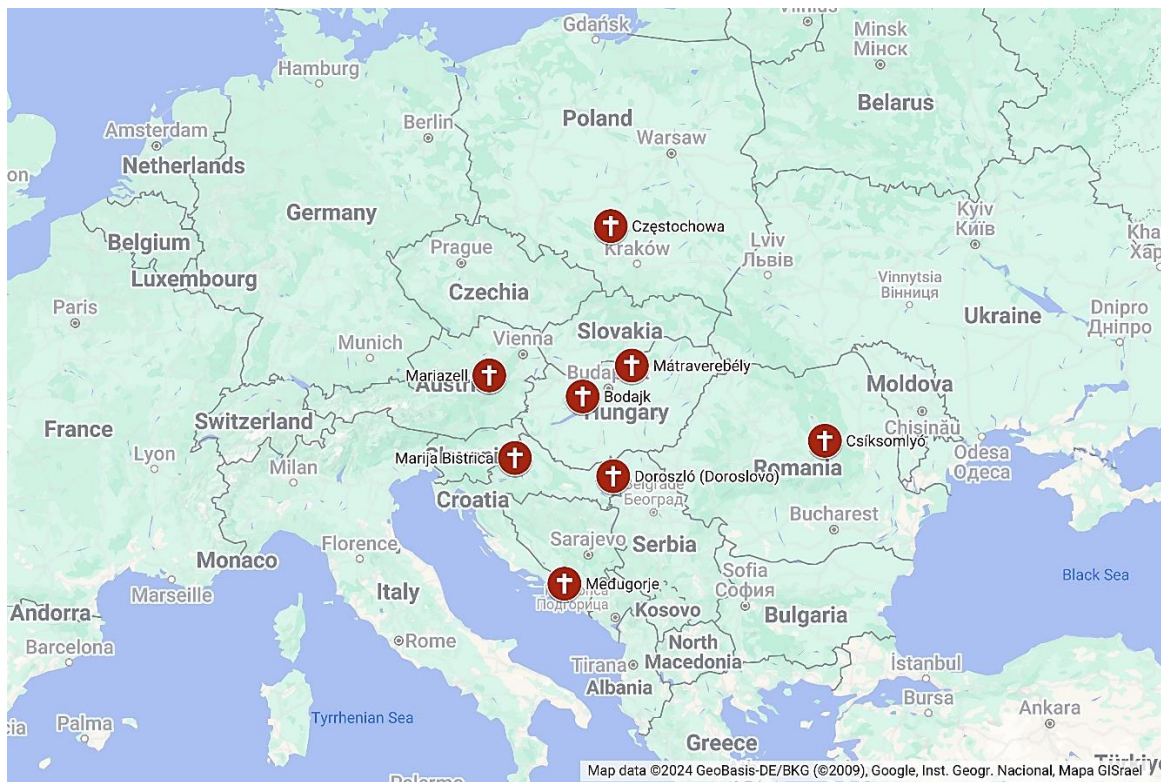
1. *History, significance*: history of the shrine, long and recent past, its mission, and its importance as a place of pilgrimage.
2. *Location*: exact address and/or coordinates of the shrine, including a map, if any.
3. *Transport accessibility*: international, regional and local accessibility of the shrine and its surroundings by relevant modes of transport (air, rail, water, road).

4. *Parking*: vehicle (motorcycle, car, bus) parking and bicycle storage facilities, conditions, fees, related services.
5. *Accessibility for the disabled*: information on the accessibility of the shrine's facilities for visitors with different types of impairment (e.g., mobility, visual, hearing, etc.)
6. *Accommodation*: contact details, types and features of accommodations provided by the shrine or available nearby.
7. *Dining options*: contact details and description of the dining facilities (restaurants, canteens, buffets, cafés, etc.) provided by the shrine or available nearby.
8. *Worship options*: the time and place of masses, devotions, prayers, vespers, rosaries, confessions, blessings, farewells and feasts.
9. *Religious services*: optional masses, spiritual exercises, sacraments (baptism, first communion, confirmation, marriage, anointing of the sick).
10. *On-site sights, attractions*: the built heritage (e.g. churches, chapels, libraries), artefacts (e.g. altars, statues, paintings) and other religious and cultural attractions (e.g., museums, events) of the shrines.
11. *Other attractions*: natural attractions, architectural sights, cultural and sporting facilities and events around the shrine.
12. *Touristic services*: additional tourist and amenity services such as information points, guided tours, souvenir shops, safekeeping, toilets, etc.
13. *Opening hours*: opening hours of certain facilities of the shrine, office hours for the administrative offices.
14. *Donations and payment*: ways of giving and donating.
15. *News updates*: regularly updated news about the life and events of the shrine.
16. *Program calendar*: scheduling of programs and events by date.
17. *Links to other (social) media*: links to the social media and other content sharing (e.g., video, podcast) profiles of the shrine.
18. *Integration with social media*: one-touch sharing of website content on social media sites, embedding social media and multimedia sharing content on the website, etc.
19. *"Cyberpilgrimage" options*: texts, images, audio, videos, webcams, live broadcasts, virtual tours, interactive features, etc.
20. *Website accessibility for the disabled*: at least partial accessibility, e.g. a high contrast, large font version for the visually impaired, reading aloud for the hearing impaired, etc.
21. *Website availability in other languages*: availability of at least the essential information in another foreign language, and preferably in English.

Based on the above, the study does not deal with the appearance and user experience of the websites, just as it was not possible to verify the accuracy and timeliness of the information. On this basis, the content and services of the websites were analyzed quantitatively using binary variables: if the website at least partially met a certain criterion (i.e. if there were at least traces of the information or service mentioned), it was given a value of 1, otherwise a value of 0. The assessment therefore takes into account the effort to provide information and accessibility rather than its concrete implementation. The numerical results are presented in aggregated form, giving an overall picture of the information content of the websites of shrines in Central Europe, using

distribution ratios and a graphical representation. The above analysis is complemented by a factual descriptive overview of the content of the websites. (The date on which the data were closed was 8th of July, 2024.) The descriptions are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide an overview of easily accessible and/or distinctive content and services. This will be followed by a brief description of the social media sites associated with the shrines as a tool for content sharing, community building and interaction, focusing only on static elements that change not or slowly over time (year of creation, number of followers) and on the activity of the shrine as a content sharer (frequency of posting, content characteristics, originality): it will not therefore address the quantity and nature of user interactivity (likes, shares, comments). Along the lines of the limitations outlined above, recommendations for further research opportunities are made at the end of the article.

Figure 1. The Central European shrines selected for the examination of their online communication



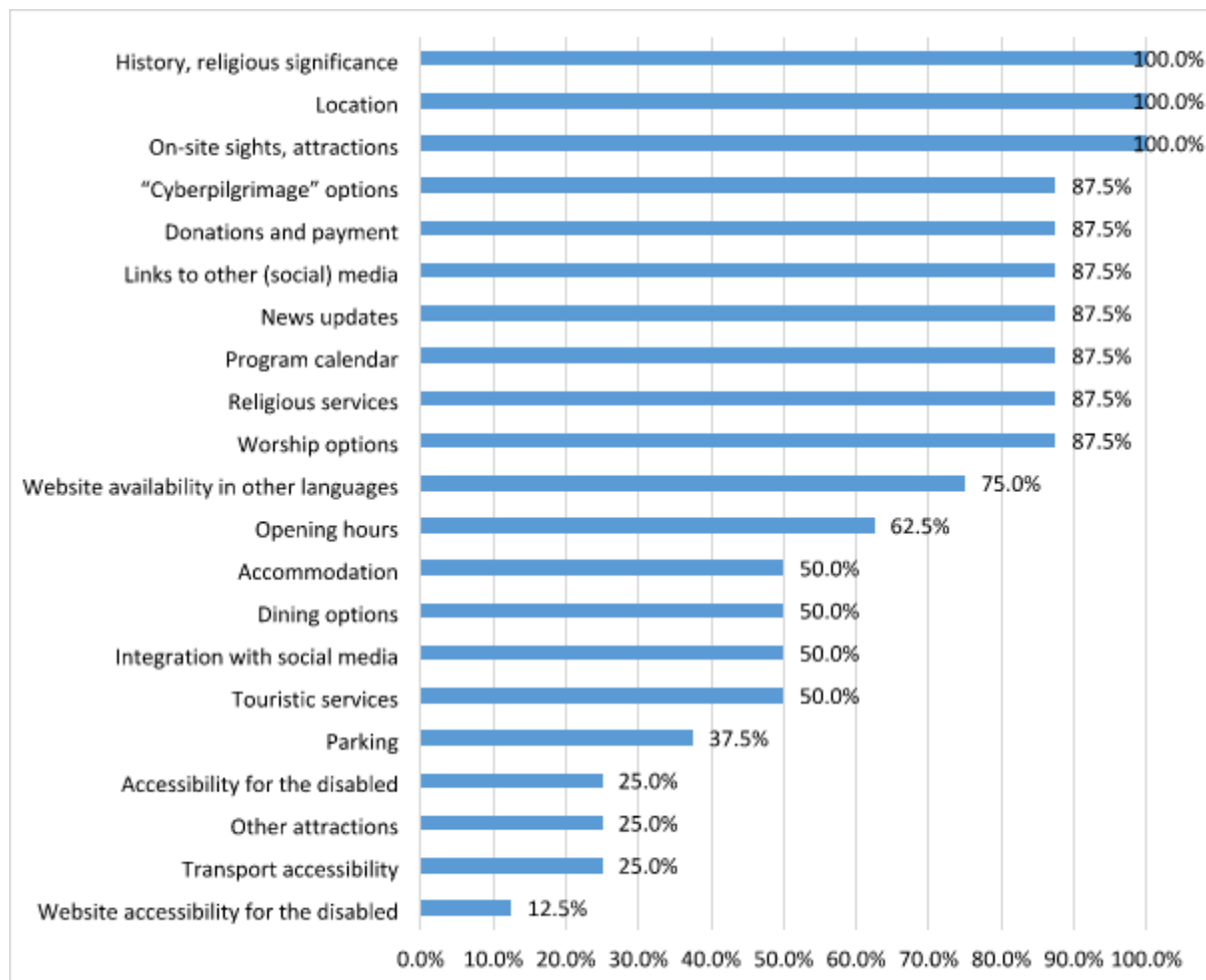
Source: own editing by Google Maps

Results

The content analysis of the websites of the eight selected Central European shrines was based on a total of 21 criteria, as described in the Material and Methods section. The results show that the criteria on information content and services include both those that are mostly met by the online sites studied, those that divide the sites, and those that are mostly not met (Figure 2). The history and location of shrines, religious activities and services, attractions within the shrine, program offer and calendar, social networking sites, 'cyberpilgrimage' options (such as written and multimedia material, livestream or webcam), information on donations, and availability in other

foreign languages are almost universally found in the information and services offered by the websites (with deviations in the level of detail of the information or quality of presentation). The availability of information on accommodation, dining, opening hours, on-site tourist services for pilgrims is present in about half of the websites, as is (some level of) integration of the website and social media interfaces. Transport accessibility, parking, accessibility for people with disabilities, local (secular) tourist attractions as information, and a conscious effort to make websites accessible for people with disabilities (e.g. visually impaired, hearing impaired) are missing in most websites. Overall, out of the possible 21 points awarded by the evaluation, the best performing website scored 19 points and the least performing website scored 6 points. The average score is 13.8, the median 13.5 and the standard deviation 4.5. Although not the subject of the study, there are significant subjective differences in the appearance, architecture, usability and user experience of the websites.

Figure 2. Percentage of shrine websites that actually provide the information and/or services specified in the criteria (status on the 8th of July 2024) [8 = 100%]



Source: own editing based on content analysis

Jasna Góra – Shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Częstochowa (Poland)

The home page of the official website for Jasna Góra, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Częstochowa, features an introduction to the sanctuary, current events, and news updates. It provides foreign

language options in English, Italian, and German, but the richest information is available in Polish. There can be detailed information found about the Miraculous Image of Our Lady, also known as the icon of the Black Madonna. It covers its history and spiritual significance. Additionally, it delves into the history and role of the Pauline Monastery and the monks who manage the sanctuary. Visitors can find practical tips for their visit, including what to see, mass and service times, and how to prepare for their trip. There is information about accommodation options. Additionally, details about parking and dining options are available. The website offers a detailed daily schedule for masses, confessions, and sacraments held at the sanctuary. Instructions on how to request individual, collective, perpetual, or Gregorian masses are provided. There is information on how to support the shrine through donations. Radio Jasna Góra offers live broadcasts and recordings of masses and other religious events. Additionally, there are live streams, particularly from the Chapel of the Miraculous Image. Contact details for various administrative and religious queries are provided. The Press Office of the shrine offers news entries, images, videos, and audio streams. Detailed rules are available for media professionals and event organizers. A rich archive of news and media content can be found at the old webpage, which was actively operational until July 2024.

Jasna Góra's main social media platform is the Facebook page, which is ran by the press office since 2013, and it has 120,000 followers and is liked by 107,000 profiles. It features various posts about events, religious ceremonies, historical information, and news related to the monastery. The language of the posts is Polish. The news sharing is continuous, with multiple posts per day, the content (text and images) is almost entirely their own, with basically no material taken from other sources. The X (Twitter) page, also run by the press office since 2017 with 15,000 followers and Instagram profile with slightly more than 2,000 followers since 2021, displays essentially the same content as the Facebook page, with the same picture material, in Polish, on a daily basis. The shrine also has a YouTube channel with almost 5,300 videos 246,000 subscribers, where the prayer of the Rosary in front of the Miraculous Image of Our Lady is streamed daily, as well as masses, novenas, concerts, educational pieces, and video announcements.

Mariazell Pilgrimage Basilica (Austria)

The homepage of the Mariazell Basilika website features announcements and news, offering information on upcoming events. It also includes a schedule detailing daily and weekly mass timings, special services, and events. Visitors can find guidelines and forms for pilgrim group registration, opening hours and services for various parts of the basilica including the main church, the treasury, and other sites. The website features articles detailing the history of Mariazell, including its founding, Benedictine influence, and evolution over centuries, as well as the affiliate churches and other religious orders being present in Mariazell. Visitors can access reflections and theological discussions by church leaders, particularly focusing on the Benedictine heritage and the significance of Mary in the pilgrimage tradition. There can be found texts of essential prayers, litanies specific to Mariazell, and other devotional materials. There are opportunities for prayers and to light candles online, with virtual candles burning for a specified period. Maps and descriptions of the basilica's layout are available, including facilities for pilgrims, and areas accessible to those with special needs. It also includes information about bicycle stands available around the basilica. There are details on the basilica's treasure chambers, including significant votive offerings and art pieces from different historical periods. Sections include descriptions of key architectural elements and church music. The page also provides links and resources for pilgrims wishing to travel to Mariazell by foot along traditional pilgrimage routes. Visitors can get information about the work of the association "Freunde der Basilika Mariazell", the possibilities

of support and subscribe to the newsletter. The magazine "Gruss Aus Mariazell" can also be downloaded. The renovation projects of the basilica are documented in detail. Connections to other pilgrimage-related websites and resources for further information on routes and spiritual preparation are displayed. In addition to the detailed German main page, the basic information about the basilica is also available in English, French, Italian, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Polish and Croatian.

The Basilica of Mariazell has had a Facebook page since 2018, with around 1,400 likes and 1,500 followers. Posts are more frequent during the summer pilgrimage season and less frequent outside of it (except perhaps during Advent), with mostly original content in German language and occasionally content shared from elsewhere. The basilica has been running its Instagram page since 2020, currently with a little over 1,000 followers. Since its launch there have been only 75 posts, and in the first half of the year 2024 (when this paper was finalized) the profile has not shown activity. The majority of the content shared are images and videos of the church itself, as well as re-sharing of Shrines of Europe's advertisements.

Međugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The Međugorje pilgrimage webpage features the latest news, with updates on events, announcements, and important notices, detailed statistics related to the pilgrimage site, and message highlights, which are regularly updated messages from the apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The Međugorje Phenomenon section details the historical background and significance of the apparitions. It provides information about the apparitions and their impact on the community and visitors, an archive of Marian messages over the years. The site outlines the history and development of the Međugorje parish, introducing the pastoral staff too. Spirituality section includes a collection of fundamental prayers for pilgrims and visitors, as well as biblical teachings and extensive theological reflections. Prayer requests can be submitted. Pilgrimage guidelines offer practical advice for pilgrims. Prayer schedule and rules for prayer groups, and information on the sights, praying spaces, meeting points, parking, first aid point, souvenir shop, and institutions connected with the sanctuary is available. The multimedia section features a photo gallery capturing the essence and events of Međugorje, live streaming feeds from the site, and video content documenting events, testimonies, and other significant happenings. Publishing section offers information about various publications related to Međugorje, i.e. a catalogue of publications, a bibliography in Croatian and other languages, and access to the "Glasnik Mira", the parish bulletin. The website also hosts comprehensive archives of messages, events, and data available for research and personal edification. A rich collection of links leads to other Međugorje-related websites. In addition to Croatian, the website is accessible in multiple languages such as English, German, French, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Hungarian, and Arabic.

The website for Radio MIR Međugorje offers a variety of content. It features sections such as: information about radio programs; updates on Međugorje, church activities, and community; daily biblical messages, spiritual encouragements, sermons, and prayers; articles on different topics by various authors; information on books and other publications; marketing, supporters, and studio information.

Međugorje's media centre, MIR, has a Facebook page for Croatian speaking audience since 2015, with with 155,000 followers and 111,000 likes. (The centre runs Facebook pages in three languages in addition since 2020, with 22,000 followers in Spanish, 17,000 in English and 10,000 in Italian.) Mostly the centre's news entries, articles, pictures/videos, prayers, and live broadcasts are shared on a daily basis. The centre operates 12 YouTube channels, in all the languages in which the website is available as well as in Serbian, Slovakian, and Russian. The main channel

in Croatian has the largest number of followers, 57,700. Among the 4,800 videos on the main channel, there are broadcasts of holy masses, speeches, educational material, interviews and music clips. Since 2018, the centre has been operating its Instagram page in Croatian and since 2020 its international Instagram page, which have 53,900 and 19,400 followers respectively, and share their own images and videos daily. On the international page, the texts of the posts are usually translated into English, Italian, German, Spanish, and Polish. There is a TikTok channel ran by the media centre, with almost 500 followers, but with only a few videos.

Croatian National Shrine of Saint Mary of Marija Bistrica (Croatia)

The website of the shrine in Marija Bistrica includes general information about the shrine, including news updates, event highlights, and quick links to important sections of the site. The website offers a 360° virtual tour of the shrine. Detailed information about the different pilgrimages, including traditional pilgrimage routes and schedules, as well as guidance for pilgrims, is available. History of the shrine, including pictures and basic information on the votive statue, way of the cross, pilgrimages and past rectors can be found. Texts offer prayers, sermons, songs, and records of hearings, graces, intercessions and miracles. Sections are dedicated to the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vinko Paulski and the Carmelite convent associated with the shrine, including contact information and details about their activities. Information about the mass schedules, sacraments, engagement courses offered for couples preparing for marriage, including schedules and registration details, is provided. The section about the parish office's opening hours provides practical information for visitors needing administrative assistance. Options for donating are available. The publications include digital versions of the parish bulletin and the "Milosti Puna" magazine. Radio Marija Bistrica live transmissions masses from the shrine. The site hosts extensive photo and video galleries documenting various events, pilgrimages, and historical moments at the shrine. Fundamental information is available in English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovenian.

The shrine has had a Facebook page since 2014, which now has 23,000 followers and 18,000 likes. The activity consists of several postings per week, mostly with original content (news, announcements, events, galleries, quotes etc.) in Croatian. The page is also active in creating and sharing event pages, which - especially since Covid - is not common. The shrine's YouTube channel, created in 2013, with 134 subscribers and only 16 videos, has been inactive since 2016.

Doroszló – The Holy Mother miracle fountain shrine (Serbia)

The home page of the website of Doroszló – Szentkút features a welcome message and recent posts, imported from the shrine's Facebook page. The site offers a detailed historical background of the site. The spirituality section consists of a voluminous article on the theology of pilgrimage. A rich archive of entries sorted by date is available in the side column of the page. The future plans for the renewal of the site can be seen as well. Additionally, the photo albums showcase images categorized by year and general themes, and the videos' section presents multimedia content related to the shrine. Detailed contact information is available.

The shrine has had a Facebook page since 2011, which currently has around 5,000 followers and 3,700 likes. The site contains a more extensive description of the shrine and all the important contact details. The activity sometimes involves multiple posts per day, but usually several posts per week, mostly in Hungarian language, including content reposted from other sources.

Csíksomlyó (Romania)

The Csíksomlyó pilgrimage shrine website offers an introduction to the shrine, providing links to various language versions including Hungarian, English, German, Romanian, Italian, and French. It includes sections for live broadcasts, upcoming events, and current announcements. A separate special section provides access to the (now archived) news and articles related to Pope Francis' visit to Csíksomlyó. The site describes the history and significance of the shrine and monastery and includes information about the Franciscan community that manages the shrine. Detailed information on the architectural and artistic values of the place is provided, including the old gothic and the current baroque style church and its relics, as well as the chapels and the Three Hill Altar on the Somlyó mountain. The site includes the order of masses, a calendar of events, such as ceremonies, pilgrimages, and other activities. Services include live webcam feeds from the shrine. The gallery features photos showcasing the shrine, events, and pilgrimages. There is a (slightly hard to find) sub-page on donation details, in addition to the quick access Pay-Pal donation option. The FAQs answers common questions about visiting the shrine, participating in events, and other inquiries. The “e-Szó” (“e-Word”) blog is available from the website, with constantly updated entries.

The Csíksomlyó shrine's Facebook page has been up and running since 2013. At the time of writing, it has 34,000 followers and 31,000 likes. The daily posts are mainly links to live streaming, but there are also event announcements and reports, articles and awareness-raising material, in Hungarian. The site also includes a private group of 18,900 members, where it is possible to find information and share content, opinions and suggestions. Since 2013, the shrine's YouTube channel has attracted 41,100 followers and posted around 2,500 videos. There is daily live coverage of masses and continuous streaming during the Pentecost pilgrimage. Since 2018, Radio Csíksomlyó and a webcam showing the interior of the church have been live-streamed on YouTube.

Mátraverebély-Szentkút National Shrine (Hungary)

The website of the Mátraverebély-Szentkút national shrine features a welcome message from the shrine director, expressing the shrine's mission. Insight into the history and significance of the shrine, managed by the Franciscan community, is also provided. It is possible to find out about the missionary activities of the Franciscan Sisters of Charity. Information is available on the conditions for joining the "Confraternitas Mariana Szentkútiensis" fraternity. Details about participating in mass, confession, and other sacraments and religious activities, including opportunities for personal spiritual guidance and communal prayers, are included, together with guidelines for pilgrim groups. Information on organizing weddings, family events, retreats, and conferences at the shrine is emphasized. In addition to info on donation, there are instructions for sending gratitude boards to the shrine. Instructions for reaching the shrine by car, bus, bicycle, and on foot are included, along with links to transportation schedules. Provisions for elderly and disabled visitors, including parking instructions and availability of wheelchairs, are described. Embedded maps and directions help visitors navigate to and within the shrine's vicinity. There are descriptions of the available accommodations and a restaurant. Details about the on-site store selling souvenirs and religious items are included. The website has sections with photo and video galleries, including image films, drone footage, and recorded interviews, showcasing the shrine and its activities. The issues of the “Szentkút Újság” newspaper, maintained by the shrine, can be downloaded. The shrine's podcast can be listened to, and its blog read. A collection of sermons and lectures related to the shrine and broader Catholic teachings is accessible. Options to view live

streams of events and ceremonies held at the shrine are also available. Essential information is available in English in Slovakian too.

The shrine's Hungarian-language Facebook page, which has been active since 2014, has 66,000 followers and 63,000 likes. In addition to exhaustive contact information, the page's introduction includes a detailed user policy. Content posted in Hungarian every 1-2 days includes news, event announcements and media content, inspirational posts, travel tips, and recently, dedicated posts introducing the shrine staff. The shrine has also had an Instagram account since 2021, currently with 560 followers and 1-2 photo or video posts per week. The X (Twitter) account was active between 2014-2015.

Bodajk – Our Lady of Help shrine (Hungary)

The website for the Shrine of Our Lady of Bodajk offers an introduction to the place, including its historical and spiritual significance. The homepage contains updates on upcoming events and other important notices. Information can be found about regular masses, special religious ceremonies, and other liturgical services held at the shrine. The webpage includes the text of hymns and prayers dedicated to the shrine's patroness, the Helping Virgin Mary of Bodajk. Visitor information includes opening hours and accessibility. Guided tours are available for groups upon prior registration. The surveillance system and alarm system for the safety of visitors and the site itself is also mentioned. There is a permanent exhibition showcasing the history of the shrine, along with an exhibition space operated by the Bodajk Local History Association. Information about booking and facilities, including the option for meals provided by local services, as well as contact details for making reservations and inquiries are available. Parish information describes the administrative structure of the parish, including the clergy and their short introduction. One can find details about the Segítő Kéz Social Foundation and its initiatives, and instructions for making financial contributions or volunteering. The site provides an overview of the columbarium's significance and the process for selecting and redeeming burial niches, and details for arranging visits. The shrine's EU-funded project activities are reported by photos and videos. The site includes information about a religious goods store, including their opening hours and special arrangements for group visits. The social media pages of the shrine can be accessed from all sub-pages of the website with a single click.

The shrine has been running a Facebook page since 2013, which now has 7,800 followers and 5,200 likes. The page covers the most important historical facts, parish functions, responsible persons, office hours, and the mass schedule. Posts several times a week include pastoral notes from the parish priest, event announcements and reports, in Hungarian. The Instagram profile, which has been operating since 2020 and features still-life-style on-site photos with changing frequency, has 140 followers. Created in 2016, the YouTube channel has been active in the year 2023, when it introduced the shrine in several videos. It has 50 subscribers.

Conclusions and recommendations

Webpages are pivotal for religious tourists, offering essential trip planning information and enabling virtual pilgrimages. Website quality lacks a universally accepted measure, though, tourism-related websites must generate interest and provide comprehensive information. Accessibility for people with disabilities is crucial but often inadequate in tourism service providers' online presence.

Most shrine websites are rich in information on the history and significance of the shrine, religious activities, on-site programs and attractions, as well as 'cyberpilgrimage' options such as live streams and virtual tours. However, there are significant gaps in practical visitor information like transport accessibility, parking, local touristic services, and accommodation. Information on accessibility for disabled visitors is largely missing from most shrine websites. Only a few shrines offer detailed guidelines and provisions for visitors with disabilities. While essential information is often available in multiple languages, the depth and breadth of multilingual content vary significantly. Although these aspects were not quantitatively assessed, notable variations in the appearance, architecture, usability, and user experience of the websites were found.

Shrine websites should improve the availability of practical information. The websites should ensure that information is regularly updated and maintained to provide accurate and timely details about events, services, and other relevant aspects. More attention should be given to making websites and physical sites accessible for visitors with disabilities. This includes providing detailed accessibility information online and ensuring facilities are equipped to accommodate all visitors. To cater to an international audience, shrine websites should offer comprehensive multilingual support. Improving the overall user experience of shrine websites can significantly enhance visitor satisfaction. This includes better website architecture, intuitive navigation, and mobile-friendliness.

Social media transforms marketing with cost-effective strategies, crucial for tourism. Tourists utilize it for travel planning and sharing experiences, while destinations use it to engage them.

There are significant differences in the extent of presence on social media platforms and the degree and nature of activity: Facebook is the most common platform, with varying degrees of emphasis on information about upcoming events, reporting on events that have taken place, live streaming, spiritual care, contemplation and prayer, and artistic content. There is variability in the level of engagement and originality of the content posted. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube are used less frequently, and some shrines have inactive or underutilized social media profiles.

Shrines should develop more consistent and engaging social media strategies. This includes regular posting, diversifying content across platforms, and encouraging user interaction.

Based on the research, it is suggested to further investigate how, beyond static content elements, websites and social networking sites perform in meeting the broad needs of believers and tourists (e.g. information, spiritual renewal, community building) in a dynamically changing environment, with accessibility and user experience in mind. This could provide more holistic insights into enhancing digital communication for shrines.

Summary

Religious tourism, rooted in pilgrimages, has expanded beyond traditional practices to include diverse spiritual and secular interests. Visitor motivations range widely, from spiritual fulfillment and cultural exploration to relaxation and curiosity. Today's pilgrims often seek comfort and lively environments over asceticism and solitude. This shift prompts a need for more modern strategies in site management. Online marketing leverages digital platforms for interactive global outreach. ICT supports tourism by improving service quality, enhancing visitor experiences, promoting events, and ensuring safety. The study analyzed the websites of Central European shrines across multiple criteria. Findings indicate varied fulfillment levels among these criteria related to information content and services. Some key areas are generally well-covered (mainly the fundamentals), some aspects are less commonly addressed (mostly extensive touristic information and features related to accessibility for the disabled), but the websites themselves show significant

discrepancies too. Many shrines have integrated social media into their online presence, but there is variability in the level of engagement and originality of the content posted. Future studies could delve deeper into the qualitative aspects of website usability, user experience, and the impact of social media engagement on pilgrimage tourism.

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