RELIGIOUS TOURISM MARKETING - USING A TOURISM OFFER IN DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

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Religion is one of the most private and controversial themes for any person. Religious activities are normally public and developed aiming the overall population for any kind of enrolment or participation. Normally, on charity actions, religious organizations and their actors have been adopting direct channels more extensively in order to communicate to those whom are expected to participate and collaborate. However, recent changes on economic environment and disruptive circumstances have forced religious to adopt new and different strategies in order to motivate and involve those benefactors for certain participation or contribution. Along this work it is presented a an original digital marketing strategy for a charity action by a religious' organization through the promotion of an tourist event.

Keywords: Marketing of Religious Tourism; Religious marketing; Digital marketing, Benefactors; Social media

1   Introduction

Tourism is an industry that is moving fast with technologies evolution. Tourism players have to handle technologies in multiple strands: operational, management and promotional. At operations level, technologies had provided many different tools and applications for effective and efficient organizational purposes. On management area much has been done and much more have to come in order to turn tourism organizations actual, competitive and leaders. Focused on promotion field, it is possible to acknowledge weighty mutations on way that organizations have already adopted many different technologies regarding their marketing and promotional strategies.

Tourism events or products offer have being used by customer organizations in order promote their sales or to reward their customers. Performed marketing actions around those topics are very often and commonly accepted.

Recently religious organizations have been facing economic constraints pushing them to an uncharted market: actually such organizations needs to argue for attention and claim for action from those supporters. One of the early strategies adopted were based on simple publicity or promotion actions over their natural network of influences. However, such efforts proved ineffective forcing then organizations to adopt other approaches and media.

Tourism events have been used as one interesting and valuable offer among religious communities. Therefore religious tourism marketing had grown and conquered adepts for charity and social causes support.

Although some controversy, marketing is being used in order to support social causes, religion activities always within a spiritual values domain. Indeed, far beyond from marketing definitions, religious marketing still is an emergent area for marketing practitioners and professionals. Despite main focus of huge part of religious organizations marketing actions concerning theology and tenet there's a remarkable influence of new technologies on their approach and communication support. Such opening had been explored through church's organizations activities for many different purposes: communication improvement, new members' affiliation or activities' development support and promotion.

Along this work religious marketing concepts are presented then on the next section some literature review about marketing of religious tourism is explored. On section four digital marketing is explained in order to end background concepts. Then on section five a practical case of a practical benefactor strategy in practice regarding based on a tourism marketing event is detailed. On ending sections discussion and conclusions are exposed.

2 Religious Marketing

Marketing and religion still are making on the beginning of their alleyway towards a science on religious world. The connection between marketing and religion concepts still is almost a taboo on Portuguese society (majority Christian) due the conservative education of communication and presence framework of church's catholic members.

Since marketing fundamentals are normally focused organizations to establish, launch, maintain or promote a service or a product to a market based on a clear economic advantage, the relation between religious players and marketing have been noticed with some objectionable tendency.

Despite marketing essence exists almost since the man has started to communicate (Marques, 2001) this behavior however has been recognized as adequate for financial based organizations. The use of marketing strategies by religious organizations or players is sometimes theme for controversy.

Some marketing religious practitioners argue that religion practice is itself a result of very well developed worth-of-mouth communication topic developed along the years. Indeed the communication action is as older as the catholic religion itself – when Jesus Christ used to preach, He usually chosen the best places and the best moment to be heard by as many as better. Thus that could be said that Christianity, on its foundations, already had vocation for the communication and propaganda.

Having in mind that marketing may be viewed as a social and an administrative practice through which individuals get satisfied their needs (Kotler, 2007) by means of an organized activity to offer, communicate and deliver products or services (American Marketing Association).

Despite an apparently scientific lack of interest, there was a considerable number of authors of that have suggested the use of the marketing approach is scripturally unsound and operates pragmatically rather than spiritually (Shepherd, 2010). Some authors criticize and argue in particular, the church growth and seeker church movements (Wagner, 1984) (McGavran, 1980), claiming that they emphasize the use of marketing methods to build congregations at the expense of teaching a scripture-based gospel message: e.g. the use of specific marketing techniques, and particularly target marketing, because its usage involves defining a suitable church vision, choosing a relatively homogenous consumer segment to match this vision, and then ministering to the needs of this highly selected congregation (Doren, 1996).

Nevertheless, an imminent middle opinion maker authors argue that religious marketing can be effective, but that there are clear limits to its use in the faith context (Shepherd, 2010). They argue that "marketing is not enough for an effective ministry" point out that "the best marketing plan in the world cannot compensate for spiritual lethargy or confusion", and that as far as "spirituality, vision, discernment, the leaders' integrity [are concerned] marketing cannot provide these". They also suggest that the adoption of marketing by the church is particularly useful at certain times, such as when there is a declining market for the religious product, or as a "response to the rapidly changing, turbulent environment in which religious organizations find themselves today" (Shawchuck et al. 1992)

To the best of our knowledge still there's no religious marketing unanimous definition. One of the most cited definitions states that as the systemic and organized use of techniques and marketing principles at religious communication objectives (Muhlenberg, 2009). Nevertheless it may be defined as a marketing activity focused on religious events and activities in order to get the maximum faith full's or believer's involvement. Hence, it would be possible to shape as main objective for religious marketing practice that is to maximize marketing tools and practice regarding religious objectives (which are far beyond faith and sacrifice) much related to those commercial objectives normally associated to marketing science.

3   Marketing of Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is one of the most important topics for the economy and its dynamics of locations, regions or even countries where the religious attraction exists (e.g., Fatima en Portugal or Lourdes in France) or event took place (e.g. a pope visit).

The attraction of Tourists is very significant because during their stay at the destination, they interact with local residents they travel around, visit, and most important are customers of those economies. Particularly, socioeconomic impacts of tourism include influx of people and related social development impacts on local communities and on cultural values (Rubio, Esteban, Rey, & Carlos, 2008).

In economic and social perspective religious tourism is obviously one financial important issue. Therefore, as a product that needs to be promoted and boosted, tourism takes a special relevance there. On such evidence those journeys are obviously a combination of a religious experience, travel and accommodation logistics: a full package of one tourism product.

Notwithstanding of many considerations and distinctions between "tourist" and "pilgrim", tourism marketing is actually an important and bigger issue to be treated as only religious subject. Hence religious tourism marketing has become one important subject to be study in different assessments:
- Tourist orign and its motivations related to religion practice;
- Local, regional or national tourism offer complementary to religious location;
- "religious economic" related business.

Despite the prominence of two former entries, by this work the focus took place over the last perspective to study how might religion tourism may benefit from digital marketing strategy for a particular charity objective.

4   Digital Marketing

Digital marketing refers to advertising and marketing efforts developed over technologies. This marketing concept embraces all types of technologies, from internet and web based to all kind of communication (mobile, iptv or satellite) to support marketing strategies and related activities. Nevertheless, digital marketing strategies might also be developed complementary in conjunction with traditional types of marketing approaches.

Digital marketing may all be broken down into more specialized areas such as Search Engine Marketing (search engine optimization, search engine publicity systems), Social Media (Facebook, youtube, Instagram or any other social network driven activities), geo reference marketing (gps location oriented information systems) digital communication marketing (mobile, ipTV, voice or email platforms with user tracking and metrics), contents and reference marketing (blogs or forum's marketing activities) among others.

4.1   Social Media Marketing

Social media applications or sites are defined by the inherent social function that improves and promotes the information sharing between users within a defined network. The network size is primarily a reflection of the active participation of the audience, as consumer-generated media represents that vast majority of all content. For consumers the true value of a network is measured by the frequency of engagement of the participants. For marketers, endorsement by consumers in the form of friending/following/subscribing validates their efforts and activates a viral distribution of their brand across channels (Walker, 2009).

Social media platforms are currently perceived as a medium to socialize (it has changed the paradigm of how people behaves online). Such platforms use web-based technology to quickly disseminate knowledge and information to a huge number of users. They allow creation and exchange of user-generated content. Moreover, social media represents low-cost tools that are used to combine technology and social interaction with the use of words. There are two benefits of social media that are important to businesses, they include (Neti, 2011): Cost reduction by decreasing staff time and Increase of probability of revenue generation.

On organizations side, social media as marketing tool that enables them to (Neti, 2011):
- Share their expertise and knowledge;
- Tap into the wisdom of their consumers;
- Enables customers helping customers;
- Engages prospects through customer evangelism.

One of the most remarkable features introduced by social media paradigm was the introduction of user in the middle at the center of the network. Is has added a participatory element where an individual not only receives information but has the ability to take part in the creation and distribution of content. Furthermore, these tools have enabled a dialogue and discovery around that content. This is the true and net value of social media paradigm: a user may simultaneously create and promote a network, putting him-self in the center, and also to belong to many others.

At business marketing side, social media value is derived not only from the primary distribution of branded content but also the additional interactions that result as users share, participate with, and propagate advertising content. In the end, social media adds another layer of value through its ability to engage users and create additional reach (Evans, 2010)(Anjum, 2012).

The current Social Media landscape can be broken into three distinct categories (Anjum, 2012):
- Social Media Sites (Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn or Twitter)
- Blogs
- Widgets & Social Media Applications

This work focus digital communication marketing for a digital strategy for religious tourism marketing and charity campaign

4.2 Digital communication platforms

The general developed society has gone digital, dramatically influenced by fast evolving online technologies and communication channels. Actually that society is moving fast from face-to-face experiences, brick and mortar environments and tangible documentation to virtual conversations, digital documentation and online experiences. Some studies revealed that 57% of people stated to talk more online than they do in real life (Trimp, 2011). What started as the World Wide Web and simple advertorial websites has now evolved into a complex platform for communicating, learning and transacting business online. This realty encompasses not just

internet but also mobile sites, applications, social media channels such Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, blogs among many others (Savage and Friedman, 2012).

Though, digital communication platforms promise easy contact between organizations and target audience, it is very important to establish best practices for communicating with them via those media: such approach would only happen to valuable if these practices are interpreted and applied correctly.

Generally digital communications best practices includes a handful of basic principles that allow to organize communications and to plan the entire process, including: establishing digital goals, objectives, and strategies, segmenting and prioritizing audiences online, defining triggers between communications steps, and evaluating through leads conversion.

5 Religious Tourism Marketing: a practical benefactor strategy in practice

Religious subject is simultaneously a personal and conviction subject. Therefore any action focusing such target should be developed accordingly. The planned strategy was conceived using Catolic church television channel (Canção Nova TV) which broadcast over a pay view system on cable tv portuguese network. This channel holds his main founds resources at a benefactors' community. Despite many interactions promoted along the time with the benefactors' network their financial presence had lowered to dramatic levels.

For this
Business objectives: Renew Canção Nova TV benefactors' activity throughout a tourism activity. This activity participation encompasses a financial contribution for the TV channel.

Marketing objectives: To communicate aiming from the target an action/response

Adopted strategy: Despite of benefactors' average age and technology adoption profile it was defined a marketing benefactor campaign which then would be depicted on several marketing activities. The adopted strategy framework was based on three phases ():
   i.   Benefactor awareness reactivation (Benefactors' heart beat campaign)
   ii. Leads conversion: benefactors' event registry (Benefactors' cloud campaign)
   iii. Charity donation: benefactors' monetary contribution (Benefactors' touch campaign).
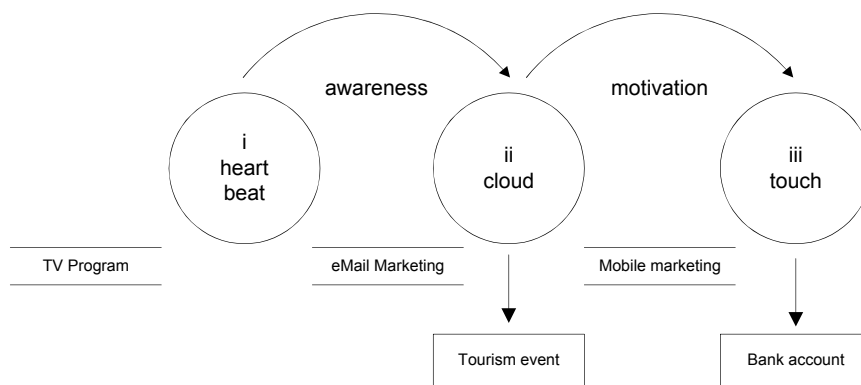
Figure 1 strategy framework

5.1 Heart beat: benefactor awareness and reactivation

On a personal basis (self consumption) generally tourism products' has relevant impact on target's mind as a personal reward or compensation. Hence, concerning the main objective (benefactors' donation) it was defined a strategy based on a religious tourism offer: a Fatima trip including special religious moments for the group (a set of religious activities such as, a group Eucharist, meal and lunch with Fatima sanctuary and TV channel staff among others). The benefactor awareness reactivation, marketing activity, was performed in different moments always using own TV channel programs as follows:

"*Benefactors' setup*"
Activity name: "working database setup"
Objective: to arrange and to update benefactors' databases.
Approach: It was delivered some emails on different occasions (2012 Christmas and for the 2013 new year). The main objective for this action was double: the benefactor awareness and data clean;
Results: Benefactor's databases had revealed many quality problems, such as wrong email address, wrong personal or contact data. Therefore it was developed a task force through phone call (using dwelling phone numbers) in order to update registers.

"Benefactors awakening"
Activity name: "celebrating your name"
Objective: to get benefactors' attention and interest.
Approach: Using TV programs, benefactors were being identified or refereed in a positive way enhancing their recognition among others. During the program, at the bottom of the screen, was continuously displayed a specific contact number so that benefactors could directly communicate and enroll as program users (indicating some personal and contact data). On every possible occasion benefactors (throughout the phone call or at the end of the program) are invited to participate on special benefactors' tourism offer.

Examples:

- Eucharist: every month at pre defined schedule the Eucharist were dedicated to benefactors' network;
- Talking program: benefactors space program whereas some topics or issues previously proposed by some of them are used for debate or analysis. All benefactors were invited through email;
- TV benefactors' club program: it was created a digital library with special access and conditions for benefactor members.

Results: benefactors had reacted positively having adhere in mass for both tv program and tourism event.

"*Benefactors' heart direct mail*"
Activity name: "a word direct to *you*"
Objective: direct and personal contact establishment regarding tourism event.
Approach: using TV databases it was created a set of emails inviting benefactors for watching TV programs (including a schedule with programs' hours). By the end of the message there was an invitation for the tourism event participation.
Results: benefactors' have read their email and many of them had answered back patting on the back of TV Canção Nova team.

"Benefactors' *Tube* channel"
Activity name: "you Benefactors' Tube "
Objective: to improve event awareness on benefactors' mind.
Approach: since most of benefactors have internet access it was created a youtube channel for the purpose to surprise and to achieve a reinforced acknowledge from them.
Results: benefactors' feedback was very interesting, but the number of video views score of by the "like" button.

5.2   Cloud: benefactors' assignment

The individual registration process is sometimes a challenge for marketers. Afterward the benefactors' reactivation phase the marketing strategy was to convert their interests and motivation on tourism event registry.

"a letter with a major mission"
Activity name: "interests' landing page"
Objective: benefactors' effective compromise for even participation through a registry process.
Approach: Using a multiplatform communication system (e-goi) was conceived an email campaign with an associated landing page and a double mobile marketing trigger.

Once the receiver click on email following the link, the landing page was then presented with a special conversion section (a set of data fields to be filled with personal registration information). Assigned to landing page was two mobile triggers. One rewarding the application form fulfillment ("*Mr <name> TV Canção Nova welcomes you for your participation*") and other activated only if the application forma weren't filled in 2 days ("*we've missed you on our guest list for our tourism event… did you forget us?... Best regards. TV Canção Nova Team*")

Results: an astonishing benefactors' registration level. Even in those cases whose didn't apply directly and were remembered by mobile SMS trigger.

5.3 Touch: Benefactors' donation

One of the most interesting challenges on charity activities is to achieve donations from their contacts. Regarding the donation effort, it was defined a double approach for benefactors' motivation purposes.

"donation recall"

Activity name: "donation's action email"

Objective: to achieve an effective donation

Approach: Using the multiplatform communication system (e-goi) was sent an email with specific massage appealing for benefactors' donation. For that end there was a bank account identifier number for wired transfer.

Results: some of benefactors have made their donation, and also send donation confirmation answering back.

"action recall"

Activity name: "donation's direct action recall"

Objective: to achieve an effective donation (remembering action).

Approach: After donations' database updating, using the multiplatform communication system (e-goi) was sent a SMS with specific massage recalling for benefactors' donation. For that end, there was included on SMS the bank account identifier number for wired transfer.

Results: some of benefactors have made their donation.

6 Results and discussion

Generally it would be possible to state that it was demonstrated tourism activities might afford many interesting communication skills through web marketing technologies. Despite the traditional target for religious marketing this marketing project had achieved a great and important results: generally it has demonstrated that most of actual benefactors are updated with technologies and that is possible to integrate digital communications technologies (email

marketing, landing pages, mobile marketing and social media youtube platform) with traditional media marketing (television channel).

Deepening on presented work, regarding the database registers' validation process it was very important for Canção Nova TV once it has allowed the organization to update their records. Most important, they have got again in touch with their support community. Based on given information almost 60% of registers were incomplete or outdated. Afterward the validation process more than 85% of records was updated.

The email marketing developed campaign has targeted to all database registered members. At the first moment, when first marketing action took place, the targeted audience had already been prepared to that communication interaction. Thus the unusual email open rate score achieved: receivers opened almost 81% of emails!

Though low technology level familiarity of many of benefactors, almost all of them have mobile phone. Since Canção Nova TV has started with this web marketing strategy much of their community technologies perception and interests have also changed. That was the case when the SMS trigger activity took place. The results were astonishing, with 100% of delivered SMS and 90% back action registered. Moreover there were cases that some of benefactors have made a phone call for Canção Nova TV redaction, congratulating them….

7   Conclusions

Tourism potential customers need to be motivated for action. Along this work we have used an exploratory approach in order to promote a touristic event. This event was a stretcher bars for another final purpose: a charity contribution for a religious organization.

Notwithstanding manly targeted audience profile, we have adopted a digital marketing strategy for religious tourism marketing event promotion and dynamics. The results were overwhelming: despite low proclivity for technologies of the targeted audience, the achieved results have proved that technologies succeed very well. Digital communications have surprised receivers through its ease of use and effectiveness. Thus their motivation to accomplish all suggested actions from youtube channel videos or mobile triggers.

Also on religious tourism it was demonstrated that is possible to develop threaded actions for target audience enrolment and motivation. For future we endorse others possibilities for tourism development based on web marketing strategies adoption, such as, experience contents sharing through digital thread activities (from Instagram to tourism blog or from a youtube video for facebook page).

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