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## From posters to posts: Greece moves beyond tourism campaigns to eDestination branding

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### Abstract

*In this paper the author presents the ways in which the Greek National Tourism Organization has promoted Greece's assets all over the world, from the creation of tourism posters to posts on Facebook, Twitter and Google+. Since the summer of 2010, the Organization's marketing strategy has seen a shift in emphasis to online marketing as a means of staying up to date with advances in new technologies and repositioning Greece in the new digital landscape. In this study, a brief presentation of the material from traditional tourism campaigns paves the way for the online advertising of Greece and the efforts made on the part of the Organization to launch websites and to create new branded content; to participate in a virtual dialogue with the country's followers and friends; to make successful use of the imagery of Greece—as social media platforms facilitate the sharing of photos; to capture momentary experiences of tourists in a microblogging post; to co-operate with major search engines such as Google and online travel agencies such as Expedia and to introduce novel promotional tools such as the monthly newsletter, the my-greece microsite, etc.*

**Keywords:** *Greek National Tourism Organization; tourism campaigns; eDestination branding; online marketing strategy; social media*

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**JEL Classification:** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

The Greek National Tourism Organization has been the main governmental body responsible for the promotion of Greece worldwide for more than half a century. At the beginning, works of art (tourism posters) were used to build the country's image as a unique tourism destination. As time went by, tourism campaigns

with a greater emphasis on marketing took over this role. However, with the advent of the Internet and new media (social media platforms), it became necessary to shift Greece's brand identity from the off line to the online world. As the authors of Handbook on e-marketing for tourism destinations claim (2008, p. xxii): "Brands are more dynamically made and re-shaped in the online world," and this is the place where destination brands can develop through the use of rich branded content (photos, videos, texts). In this transitional phase from the traditional way of destination advertising to eDestination Branding, the GNTO has undertaken and launched new and successful initiatives in its ongoing efforts to be actively involved in this new era of digital communication between travellers and destinations.

## 2. Literature Review

As far as Destination Branding is concerned, a destination is an entity with its own unique personality (brand essence). Every National Tourism Organization's (henceforth: NTO) purpose is to find and bring out a destination's most attractive characteristics (features, attributes) and to build up an image based on a positive, well-deserved reputation (brand equity). Above all, a destination is a place where new experiences await and dreams come true.

In the realm of the travel and the tourism industry, destination branding has grown considerably in importance over the years. Synonymous with Competitive Identity (a term coined by Anholt, United Nations World Tourism Organization & European Travel Committee, Introductory Essay, 2010, p. xi), it represents the core essence and enduring characteristics which make up a destination's personality and make it distinctive and different from all its competitors. Authors define brand further as a destination's DNA:

A destination brand is the sum of perceptions that someone has about a place (whether based on experience, hearsay or prejudice), which influence his/her attitudes towards that destination at an emotional level. It represents the mix of the core characteristics of the place that make it distinctive and memorable. It is the enduring essence of the place that makes it different from all other places (and competitors) (UNWTO & ETC, 2010, p. xvii)

As a consequence, a brand lies at the core of all marketing activities and guides all marketing communication activities. A destination brand should also evolve over time to meet new consumer needs and challenges. The term *experience economy* has been used to describe the new type of economy in developed countries which follows on from the industrial and service economies. This refers to the notion that people are seeking a different kind of value return from their disposable income which is increasingly taking the form of an experience rather than a physical product. As far as travel behaviour is concerned, people are searching for authenticity and the opportunity to refresh their minds and souls or reconnect with a partner/family in a more tranquil environment. Travel behaviour can take many forms, such as travelling to learn another language, to learn to paint, to experience a different culture or to pursue an interest or hobby such as bird watching or scuba diving. In other words, *experience* becomes the object of the holiday, not just relaxation or sightseeing. Fulfilment comes from involvement, understanding and self-improvement—returning home a more knowledgeable, spiritually refreshed or more experienced person (UNWTO & ETC, 2010, p. 22-23).<sup>[1]</sup>

It goes without saying that the Internet has dramatically changed the way tourists | travellers<sup>[2]</sup> communicate with each other, exchange views about their holidays, interact with the tourist–industry in general as they organize their trips (pre-trip), or comment on services offered at hotels, restaurants (on-trip or post-trip), etc. (see Cho, Wang & Fesenmaier, 2002; Green, 2002; Mossberg, 2003; Gretzel, Fesenmaier & O'Leary, 2006; Huang, Backman & Backman, 2010; as cited in Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2013, p. 548). The impact of online communication and the subsequent spread of information sharing has been systematically studied by tourism researchers, who all agree that advances in technology and the development of the tourism sector occupy common ground both as socio-economic phenomena and as systems where the provision of services and the narrative of experiences (tourism) on the one hand and the need for the emergence of novel channels of communication (Internet) on the other are inextricably interwoven (cf. Buhalis, 2003; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003; Buhalis & Law 2008; as cited in Neuhofer et al., 2013; Buhalis, Leung & Law, 2011). As Buhalis and Jun (2011) put it: "The adoption of a range of ICTs and the Internet has induced a paradigm shift in the tourism industry, known as e-tourism (Buhalis & Jun, 2011; as

cited in Neuhofer et al., 2013, p. 548; [emphasis added]; see also Katsoni & Venetsanopoulou, 2013). Within a computer-mediated environment valuable online content is generated and shared and in this way “the experience [...] can simulate real visits and virtual experience and provide almost real-life experiences” (Buhalis et al., 2011, p. 211).

Microblogging, (cf. Honeycatt & Herring, 2009; Lee, 2011) user generated content (UGC) or, more specifically, tourist created content (TCC), (cf. Munar 2010 and 2011; see also the section on blogs) and eWOM (electronic Word of Mouth; Tham, Croy & Mair, 2013) are the key terms used to refer to social network sites through which travellers and destinations share multimedia content: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Flickr, LinkedIn, etc. Tourists who participate in such online communities<sup>[3]</sup> post photos and videos, recount experiences and add to other online content (Tourism Economics, 2013), whose value increases as the content itself becomes more accessible, usable and reusable (cf. Munar, 2010, p. 4). As Sigala (2009) puts it: “The emergence of the Web 2.0 and social media has turned the Internet into a wide space of social networking and collaboration of users” (as cited in Neuhofer et al., 2013, p. 548-549).

In the realm of destination branding, social media profiles are the (cyber | virtual) spaces where users are encouraged to engage with a destination and turn their momentary, physical location of Self in the place into an enduring inscription (Thurlow & Jaworski, p. 242-243). (We could argue that both destinations and travellers participate in a so-called “self-reporting” communication as they express their own feelings, thoughts, and actions; see Lee, 2011. And in this way “The medium is the message: Look how cool I am (I’m on Foursquare); look how in touch I am (I use Twitter); look how much I care (I have a Facebook profile)” ([emphasis in the original]; Thurlow 2012; p. 12). Social media sites and eWOM, in general, offer “a decision maker the added convenience of quantity, time, and a customized search for interactive discussions about tourist experiences” (Tham et al., 2013, p. 150). In addition, a destination develops its unique brand persona (as already mentioned above, p. 9) using these special platforms to build trust, stay competitive in the market (cf. Buhalis & Wagner, 2013), manage its online reputation and deploy all its features and attributes:

Social-networking sites offer brands many opportunities for engagement. When brand profiles are created, the brands can exist as “people” on the sites. The existence of a brand as a person enhances the ability of the brand to use conversation marketing. Building a brand persona strengthens brand personality, differentiates brands from competitors, and sets the stage for a perceived relationship. (Tuten, 2008, p. 47)

However, and of interest to us here, what has been the most impressive thing is the expansion of the online dialogue between travellers and destinations across the world. In this interaction travellers talk about and share their experiences, while destinations have acquired human characteristics – they have their own voice; they can speak like people and express the characteristics of their unique personality—creating and selling experiences to potential tourists (cf. Vazou & Politis, forthcoming).

In this study we focus on how Greece, and the GNTO in particular, have undergone this shift in their attempt to involve themselves through online self-promotion in “what may be understood as a form of ‘autoethnography’: “the authoritative representation of ‘ourselves’ or ‘our’ landscape, traditions, and way of life” (Buzard, 2001, p. 300; as cited in Hallett & Kaplan-Weigner, 2010, p.13).

### **3. Methodology**

Aiming at presenting the GNTO’s shift from the off line to the online Greece’s promotion the author collected and analysed a vast amount of data. Starting with the tourism posters which were produced from the 30’s till the 00’s, the author proceeded with the collection of the typical tourism campaigns’ material, such as print ads, covering the time period from 1993 till 2013. Furthermore, being a member of the “Portal Team” which was created in the summer of 2010 within the GNTO administrative structure, the author (as editor-in-chief) was responsible for the final proofreading (in Greek and English) at all levels (from the typography to factual accuracy) taking into account the linguistic and cultural background of readers of the newsletter outside of Greece (avoidance of sexism in language usage, avoidance of conspicuous references to acts or events that could offend certain social or religious groups, etc.). The author was also responsible for presenting the articles in a form that was appropriate for Internet use. Additionally, appointed as Head of the Programme “Multimedia and multimodal promotion of the culture and tourism in Greece”, (in the context of

the National Strategic Reference Framework, in particular the Operational Programme “Digital Convergence”) the author wrote a study (call for tender) concerning the standards and appraisal criteria for web-based texts.

Moreover, as a member of the “Portal Team”, the author compiled the monthly e-newsletter, and wrote new Internet content to enrich the VisitGreece portal with additional information. The “Portal Team” also worked closely with the “Social Media Team”, discussing together about the topics of the articles to be written every month, taking into account the time of year, the cultural events that took place all over Greece, and the various forms of tourism needed to be promoted according to the general marketing plan. Apart from writing and proofreading the digital content, the author has also collected a considerable amount of VisitGreece articles, Facebook and Google+ posts, tweets and Foursquare tips and updates.

Finally, the author has built up an extensive archive of the official GNTTO documents which has shaped Greece’s marketing policy, and has studied systematically all the strategic marketing plans which has been the product of serious deliberations between the GNTTO officials and destination marketing experts.

### **Greece’s Promotion Throughout the Decades**

Greece’s tourism policy dates back to the late 30’s, when tourism began to evolve into a strong pillar of the Greek economy. The Greek National Tourism Organization (henceforth GNTTO) is the main governmental body responsible for the promotion of the country worldwide. Through the campaigns it has launched over the past 60 years, the GNTTO has decisively shaped the country’s personality and formed its brand identity.

However, the promotion of Greece as a tourism destination began with the production of tourism posters back in the decade 1920-30. Idyllic visual representations and colourful descriptions of the Greek landscape were combined in posters which represented the first efforts in a series of advertising campaigns that would continue in the years to come. From the 20’s until the 00’s, the GNTTO worked together with famous artists (including visual and graphic artists, photographers, architects and set designers) and even skilled lithographers to produce art works that promoted Greece’s attractions all over the world. These posters were closely connected with the aesthetic explorations of their times and were strongly influenced by major historical world events such as WWII (for a more detailed study of Greek tourism posters, see Ministry of Tourism-GNTTO, 2007). In the 90s the GNTTO began to join forces with advertising companies in an attempt to launch more comprehensive, destination marketing-oriented campaigns. The campaign tools included print advertisements and radio and TV commercials. (In parallel, the Organization was also responsible for the publication of tourist guides, pamphlets and special editions of books as complementary promotional material.)

With a few exceptions, GNTTO advertising campaigns have been aimed primarily at foreign audiences. Thus, we find verbal messages (slogans, taglines, body copy etc.) written in English, French, German (and other languages, depending on which tourism markets the marketing efforts were aimed at)—with English being the preferred language of communication. The images have mainly depicted the beauty of the sea and mountainscapes, internationally famous ancient and Byzantine monuments—most of which are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the Acropolis, the Oracle of Delphi, and many Byzantine churches—and cosmopolitan destinations such as the islands of Mykonos, Rhodes and Corfu. All these assets have been used to define the country’s (tourism) identity and its brand essence. In terms of tourism management, this branding approach is based on the concept of so-called “mass tourism,” a historical phenomenon of outbound international tourism which is primarily seasonal in nature and motivated in the main by 3S tourism (sun, sea & sand), and to a minor extent by cultural tourism and nature-based tourism (Lominé & Edmunds, 2007, p. 123). In other words, Greece has been established as a summer holiday destination, faithfully preserving its reputation as the “Cradle of Western Civilisation.”

From the 2006 campaign onwards other assets of Greece have begun to be promoted more systematically, i.e. nightlife, lesser known activities (such as horse-back riding on the beach), gastronomy, etc. From 2007 until today, the GNTTO marketing campaigns have observed certain criteria set by the fundamental principles of destination branding (see PRC Group, THR International Tourism Consultants, & MRB Hellas SA, 2007). In 2007 extensive market research and an analysis of how Greece and its competitor countries were perceived resulted in an attempt to rebrand Greece, to redefine its brand essence and to present its features, benefits and

attributes in a new light, with the ultimate purpose of re-positioning the country in the tourism market in such a way that it occupies a special place in the minds of tourist-targets (Kouris, 2009).

The campaign “Greece: The true experience” was the product of this work. In this campaign Greece’s brand essence was defined as follows: “A destination of unparalleled largely-unknown contrasts, creating an infinite experience space, in which unheard-of stories simply unfold.” The country was promoted as a destination of unparalleled, largely unknown contrasts —the “infinite experience place”—where members of the creative class would find the new, self-transformational, experiences they sought. In essence, the country invited tourists “to discover the Greece they don’t know” (Kouris, 2009, p. 170-171). This message was communicated through the imagery and register of the campaign’s print ads (see Figure 1).

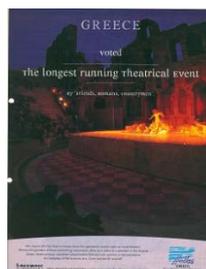
In 2012, the Greek tourism media strategy followed the core principles of the abovementioned marketing plan to create the “Greece: All time classic” campaign, which embodied the universal values of Greece. In this campaign the country was redefined as “a mark of global symbols and ideals of humanity, the place that gave birth to democracy and Olympism, the cradle of sciences, home of culture, the land of natural beauty” (see Greek National Tourism Organization 2012a & 2012b; see also Figure 1).

As we have already seen, the Greek National Tourism Organization has used the country’s symbols to reflect its brand values for many years: Crystal-clear waters and sun-drenched beaches, ancient culture, natural wealth and sacred sites, constituents of Greece’s brand essence communicated through imagery and verbal messages. In the following table, we can see a collection of print ads from 1991 till 2013 (Figure 1):

**Figure 1.** GNTO posters and ads throughout the decades



1991-1993. Greece: Chosen by the Gods



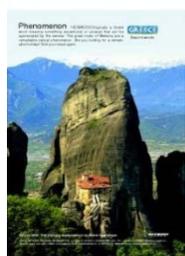
1997. Greece: The authentic choice



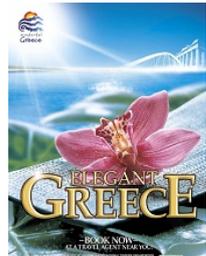
1999. Greece: That’s life!



2002-2003. Greece: Beyond words!



2002-2003. Greece: Beyond words!



2006. Elegant Greece



2007. Greece explore your senses



2008. Greece: The true experience



2009. Greece: years old. A masterpiece you can afford



2010. Greece. Kalimera!



2011. Greece Part of Our Soul History



2013 Greece: All time classic Welcome home

So far, we have described the role of the GNTTO generally in the promotion of Greece throughout the years as it presented the so-called “traditional” tools of destination branding, i.e. posters and tourism campaigns. However, as this paper is about the way Greece promotes itself through the use of the Internet, let us examine how advances in communication technologies and the creation of diverse information sources and channels (online marketing, social media, booking platforms, etc.) help a tourism destination establish its brand identity by addressing audiences around the world.

### **Moving Forward: Greece Meets eDestination Branding**

*The GNTTO portal history; Heading towards the visitgreece.gr portal Around 2000*

Probably unknown to many, and almost a decade prior to the creation of today’s website, another www.gntto.gr was created with a dual purpose: (1) to promote the country as a tourist destination and (2) to inform the public about tourism issues. The target groups identified were members of the public-consumers-tourists, professionals in the tourism industry and interested groups (other businesses, researchers, journalists, students, etc.). The material used on this site ran to 1000 pages, with some 450 photographs. It was divided into three main sections: “Travel Guide”, “Business Information” and “GNTTO”. Below is the home page (with the logo of the corresponding campaign 1999-2000) and the first page of some of the other sections (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** The GNTTO website (around 2000)



Homepage



Photo album



Travel guide



About the GNTTO



Hotel search form



Business information;  
Investing in tourism

*From 2004 to 2010*

The previous web application was succeeded by a new portal that operated until around the early summer of 2010. The new “Greek tourism portal is our global portal for the creation and promotion of unrivalled travel experiences • an entertainment portal with fun and fantasy” (see Greek Geeks, 2004). The portal has been presented as the first concerted effort in the process of implementing the marketing plan for Greek tourism and it represented an opportunity: (1) to highlight the competitive advantages of the Greek tourism economy, (2) to pass on news of the restructuring of our tourist product to the public worldwide, (3) to get away from the restrictive sun and sea tourism model and to move towards an era of year-round tourism, (4) to promote the Greek leisure and entertainment economy as a pillar of growth for the tourism industry, (5) to make the process of conveying information about Greece’s tourism product more interactive, etc.

In addition, the portal was called on to establish a strong image and identity for the destination and all the elements of the portal - words, pictures or any other tool used – were exploited to express “the Greece we all dream of”. The portal in itself was designed to constitute a “special experience” (Greek Geeks, 2004). With the interactiveness that governs computer-mediated communication, the portal was aimed at being a “platform for expression” via which “the user should want to touch, taste and smell Greece • to enjoy the Greek way of life • to explore authentic Greek aesthetics • to participate in everyday Greek cultural experiences and, ultimately, to live the Greece experience even before the visit,” (Greek Geeks, 2004). Here is the home page of the portal (see Figure 3):

**Figure 3.** The GNTO homepage (app. 2004-2010)



*Spring 2010 till today*

Towards late spring 2010, the portal was redesigned and social media became important tools for promoting tourism in Greece. Also, great efforts were made to refresh and enrich the texts and multimedia content with the help of skilled copywriters, translators and photographers working for the NTO and the “Portal Team” was set up in collaboration with third parties, such as qualified travel guides. Against a background of spending cuts in tourism advertising, the Internet was seen as the best and most effective way to spread the message about the uniqueness of Greece as a tourist destination while simultaneously redefining Greece (repositioning | rebranding) as a modern country fully integrated into the electronic era. The entire project was approved by the decision issued by the Chairman of the NTO relating to the “Greek National Tourism Organization’s strategy for promotion and presentation in the coming three years (2011-2012-2013),” in which explicit reference is made to the emphasis to be given to the portal and online advertising. We present here some extracts from the decision:

**Emphasis on the portal.** (...) The NTO should invest in its website and expand its content and technological support. The NTO portal is the “base” from which the Organization can communicate in real time its policies, priorities and new products in a manner which appeals to all interested parties. In addition, the portal should be extended and developed in accordance with the “tools” of ICT, so that it can play a key role in communications

**Online advertising.** The online advertising campaign should take place in a particular period of the year, i.e. when tourists are looking for the information they need to decide on their holiday destination. The main tools are interactive banners, which are placed on webpages that target appropriate consumers and on the websites of intermediaries. They can also be posted on widely used search engines. The use of SEO (search engine

between the Organization and the international community and in the provision of information and become an essential tool for crisis management.

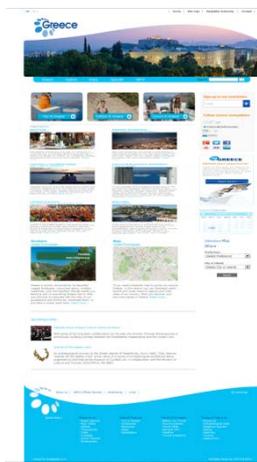
optimisation) techniques also plays an important part in increasing the number of visitors to the NTO website.

Based on this, the YOUNGREECE campaign was created, the content of which is posted on the websites visitgreece, Flickr and also YOUTUBE, as it consist of videos, photos, banners, wallpapers and downloads for iPhone (for more information on the communicative aims of the campaign, see Press Kit 2010).

Here we can see the portal homepage from 2010 until today (see Figure 4):

**Figure 4.** The [www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr) portal

Homepage till 2012



A renovated homepage;  
September 2012



“Greece all time classic”  
campaign; April 2013 till today  
(Feb 2014)



Below there is a brief presentation of the web applications and communication tools that have contributed (and continue to contribute) to the online promotion of Greece.

### *The VisitGreece newsletter*

The first issue of the GNTO newsletter appeared in July 2010. The GNTO, as a social actor and governmental entity, produced this newsletter in an attempt to create a fresh positive destination image by exploiting the opportunities offered by the Internet. The newsletter goes online every month, with topics selected according to: (a) the time of year (November: olive harvesting; January: skiing, etc.), (b) tourist activities, in order to promote Greece as a year-round destination, (c) important cultural events (“Dimitria” in Thessaloniki), and so on (for a detailed analysis, see Politis & Vazou, 2012).

The visitgreece newsletter has all the typical features of a promotional travel genre distributed via the Internet (a novel hybrid cybergenre) because: (a) it uses a wide range of multimodal resources (text, video, image) aimed at “encouraging” people from all over the world to visit Greece; (b) its layout is determined by the medium: it is vertically organised to be easily read on the Internet; (c) it demonstrates a certain degree of interactivity and intimacy since the addressee signs up to receive it; (d) it offers favourable information encoded into promotional messages according to underlying principles of credibility (news writing) and desire (ads).

### *My-Greece*

The microsite *my-greece* appeared in November 2010. Designed to operate as a stand-alone site with its own url, it is promoted via [visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr). (For a description of this project and its aims see the “my-Greece: Project ID” report.): The main element of this new project will be a user-friendly digital map (Google map). Users are invited to upload their favourite photographs and video clips so that they can put the spotlight on the Greece they love, on the beauty of the country’s landscape and on everything it has that makes it special. Amongst its key communicative purposes are: (a) To get Greek people themselves involved and let them play their own part in promoting the country abroad, and (b) to capitalise on one of the most effective advertising tools available to tourist destinations, i.e., word of mouth promotion.

### *The Greek travel business news*

As part of the efforts to create online monthly bulletins, the so-called *Business Newsletter* was produced in June 2011 to provide twice-monthly updates on developments in the tourism market and to disseminate news about the latest activities of what was then called the Ministry of Culture & Tourism and the NTO. This bulletin contained texts which acted as a short introduction to the main article, to which the reader was guided by links. Initially, the texts were posted on the [visitgreece](http://visitgreece.gr) website and later on the government website of the NTO ([www.gnto.gov.gr](http://www.gnto.gov.gr)), an indication of their communicative goal and of their nature as informative rather than promotional material. The last newsletter was in July 2012.

### *The “True Greece” initiative*

In June 2012, the GNTO introduced the “The True Greece” initiative (see GNTO, 2012c& 2012d; [abouTourism, 2012](#)), a web-based platform integrated into its overall online marketing strategy. Although not a promotional tool per se, True Greece can be described as an “Online Reputation Management & Brand Monitoring Mechanism which allows the Organization to track, register and manage all comments, reviews and observations that refer to Greece as a tourism destination. Through the use of the GNTO social media platforms, the initiative is aimed at disseminating positive messages that visitors express via video spots, web testimonials, reviews, posts, tweets, etc. The project also relies on volunteers’ support, using *True Supporters*, a team of volunteers responsible for monitoring and responding to online comments regarding Greece as a tourist destination. The True Supporters idea is based on the concept that the most effective response to negative comments and inaccuracies is provided by real people that feel passionate about the destination.

### *The GNTO online marketing strategy*

The “Greek National Tourism Organization’s strategy for promotion and presentation online” (see GNTO, 2012e) operated in tandem with the main “Greek National Tourism Organization’s strategy for promotion and presentation in the coming three years (2011-2012-2013)”, (see GNTO, 2010). Its main objective was to strengthen awareness of Greece as a tourist destination and to attract travellers to the country from target markets. Following the principles of so-called “5 stages of a trip”, the GNTO launched a partnership with providers of online promotional material (search engines and online booking agencies), aligning each promotional activity with one of the stages—as we can see in the next figure (Figure 5):

**Figure 5.** The 5 stages of a trip

**Dreaming-Planning-Booking-Experiencing-Sharing**

**The 5 stages of a trip**



**Dreaming:** 55% of travellers look online for information after they see an online advertisement.

**Planning:** 85% of travellers regard the Internet as their main source of information as they plan their trip.

**Booking:** 1 in 3 travellers claim the Internet prompted them to book their trip.

**Experiencing:** 70% of travellers use their mobile phone to check-in at their hotel, on their flight or on their cruise ship.

**Sharing:** 52% share photographs online and 32% post reviews of places they have visited.

So, for *dreaming* and *planning* we can see partnerships with Google, YOUTUBE and Yahoo! (<http://visitgreece.travel.yahoo.net/>) and WAYN (<http://www.wayn.com/d902/visit-greece>) (platforms which make use of the basic content created by VisitGreece in conjunction with the Organization's marketing strategy and target users looking for travel information and “consuming” digital content relating to tourism).

Partnerships with online booking engines such as Expedia and Last Minute fall into the category of “Bookings” and are aimed at travellers whose travel plans are motivated by the Internet. Additionally, *experiencing* and *sharing* include activities to promote Greece online with the help of social media and other online tools which create and disseminate tourism material (e.g. blog).

Finally, the partnership with Vodafone marked a tentative launch into the next era of promoting destinations using smartphones, taking account of the proportion and particular needs of tourists who own smartphones and plan their trips using them and the Internet.

Social media have been used for the first time by the NTO to promote Greece as part of the overall restructuring of the portal [www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr) and of the organization's communication strategy, which proposes using online promotion as a tool to counter the negative image of the country and to reposition it in the international competitive environment as a renewed and modernised tourist product.

Below is a short guide to the GNTO social media platforms accompanied by a brief description of their communicative goals and objectives. (The order of presentation is chronological.)

### The GNTO Enters the World of Social Media

Facebook | <https://www.facebook.com/visitgreecegr>

It started with Facebook in March 2010 and later came Twitter (October 2010), Foursquare (September 2011), Google+ (November 2011) and Pinterest (August 2012)

The “Facebook Handbook” reveals the reasons for choosing Facebook as a medium for online promotion:

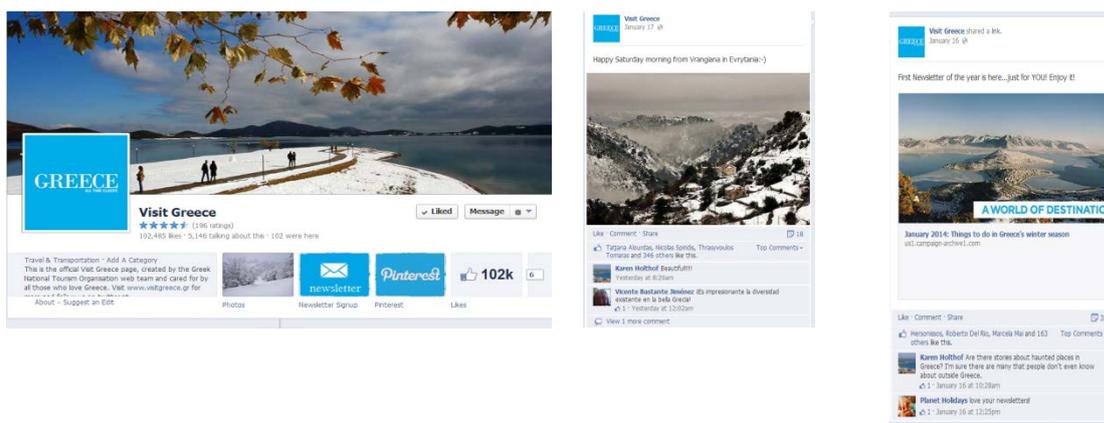
Highly interactive; it manages to build interpersonal relationships with each individual separately via proper management, something which helps to increase the number of fans of the page. By extension, this gives us the ability to project the right image we want for Greece, an image which emerges via our new strategy, which presents our country as an ideal destination for every season and for every age. (GNTO, 2012f)

In addition, via Facebook, the interpersonal contact with users that has developed provides the Organization with ongoing and constantly updated information about the wishes of those planning to travel to the country and keeps us up to date about the experiences of those who have already visited. This continuous

feedback allows the NTO to see at “first hand” the trends in international tourism and to adjust its strategy to promote the country according to the ever changing requirements of the tourism market. We can, as a result, “structure a better image for Greek and foreign visitors and we can offer the best services” (GNTO, 2012f, p. 1).

In the section “About” (<https://www.facebook.com/visitgreecegr/info>), the Organization gives information about the VisitGreece page on Facebook and describes the mission of the page as follows: “To show and share what Greece is all about: the tastes and the vistas, the blues and the greens, the islands and the mountains, the history and the culture, but most of all, the people and the hospitality” (see also Figure 6).

**Figure 6.** Facebook page and posts



Twitter / <https://twitter.com/visitgreecegr>

In October 2010 the GNTO launched its online presence in Greece on Twitter. In the “User Guide to Twitter” (GNTO, 2012g) the reasons for creating the account are given: promoting tourism material, immediate response to travellers’ questions, the development of live, pleasant dialogue with those who refer to Greece as a tourist destination, retweeting of tweets about the beauties of the country and about visitors’ positive experiences, thanking those who repost messages from the visitgreece account, etc. (GNTO, 2012g).

This all indicates that Twitter is a medium where a strong interplay (interaction) can develop between Twitter users and the Organization to create bonds of trust between followers of visitgreece and the destination itself (in this case the Internet group that represents the destination).

Finally, note that the Twitter account received an award in May 2012 in the “e-awards-Greek internet awards”.<sup>[4]</sup>

Foursquare / <https://foursquare.com/visitgreecegr>

Since September 2011 the official Visit Greece page on Foursquare has been inviting users to “share and discover travel ideas and the hidden secrets that make Greece a vibrant and exciting destination which no visitor would ever want to leave.”

Foursquare and its content have also been described as “an important tool for our presence on the web and for our communications strategy, an important interactive means to promote Greece as a unique tourist destination at any time of the year” (GNTO, 2012h, p.1). Foursquare “will highlight and make known the special beauty of Greece.” What it contains - such as advice on destinations and activities (tips) that users of the medium create – is selected on the basis of the communication strategy of the NTO, which is based on three main themes: (a) Culture (“Greek spirit”), (b) nature (“Greek life”), and (c) Lifestyle (“Greek lifestyle”).

Google+ / <https://plus.google.com/+greece>

There is no user manual for Google + that corresponds to the manual for other media. In its absence, we will note that the Google + account was the subject of a case study by Google (Google, 2012), the report of

which refers to how VisitGreece had succeeded in “making photos of Greece better known than the crisis that has hit the country.”

As an adopter of Google+ since day one, Visit Greece was the first tourism related Organization to set up a Google +page globally. Visit Greece regularly posts high resolution photos on Google+ as an effective visual way to communicate the diverse joys of the Greece “brand” to followers. Visit Greece quickly realised that for its business, rich media content is vital and has proved itself to be much more important than links or text. <sup>[5]. [6]</sup> (Google, 2012, p. 1)

*The blog* / <http://blog.visitgreece.gr>

The visitgreece blog is a distinct genre of user-generated content. This is because some of the articles posted on the blog website are written by individuals (tourism bloggers, travellers, etc.), a specific type of content defined as Tourist Created Content (TCC), a term coined by Munar (2010, 2011). As Munar (2010, p.11) states, TCC can be seen as the virtualisation and digitalisation of the word-of-mouth, an important component of the tourism experience and a relevant tourism marketing tool. In her 2011 study she further analyses the impact of TCC on destination branding:

The image of a destination is owned by tourists and permeated by the socio-cultural and economic changes that impact on their sensitiveness. (...) Tourists relate to the destination brand by participating in image formation and by adopting and using these formal elements in their different types of generated content on the web (Munar, 2011; p. 293).

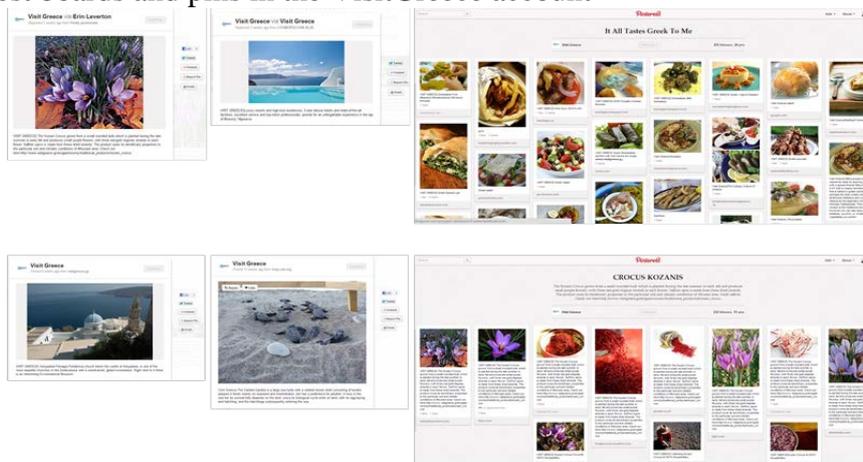
The visitgreece blog has been described as the “next step in the development of the GNTO’s online promotion strategy” (GNTO, 2012i, p. 1). The reasoning behind this definition lies in the very nature of the visitgreece blog. Apart from encouraging visitors to interact and exchange experiences of their travels in Greece, the blog has become a place where novel, creative and original tourism content is created; in this way information regarding Greece as a tourism destination is also enriched.

*Pinterest* / <https://www.pinterest.com/visitgreecegr>

In the August 2012 newsletter, the GNTO announced the creation of a new social media platform, called *Pinterest*, in the following message (see also Figure 7):

At the Greek National Tourism Organization (G.N.T.O.) we seek to utilise the power of Social Media to communicate and share useful travel tips and information about Greece. In doing so, we have created the official Visit Greece [Pinterest page](#)! Now you can “Pin” the beauties of Greece, destinations and places of interest, Greek gastronomy and delicacies and follow the Official Visit Greece Pinterest page. You will discover useful travel tips and small secrets that will make your travel experience even more memorable!

**Figure 7.** Pinterest boards and pins in the VisitGreece account



### Other GNTTO accounts

The GNTTO has accounts on other online platforms as well, such as Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/visitgreecegr>), YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/visitgreecegr>), and Instagram (<http://instagram.com/visitgreecegr>). Due to page limits, I have narrowed down this analysis to those social media that in the main combine visual and textual content (or modes of making meaning), which is characterized as multimodal content (cf. Kress, 2010).

Before closing this study, the author would like to add that, in a recent speech, the General Secretary of the GNTTO (Mr. Panos Leivadadas and the Ministry of Tourism (Mrs. Olga Kefalogianni) pointed out in their presentation of the Organization's communication strategy the great importance of using the Internet in order to strengthen Greece's position in the global tourism market (GNTTO, 2013).

## 4. Conclusion

In this study the author has shown the leading role played by the Greek National Tourism Organization and its promotional strategies in defining Greece's identity as a tourism destination worldwide over the years. Starting with the creation of the first posters back in the late 20s, the author presented the transition from traditional tourism campaigns to online destination branding (eDestination Branding). With the emphasis primarily placed on the GNTTO's online presence, the author discussed the overall marketing plan and how it evolved and was enriched into an online marketing strategy through the creation of multimedia content and the use of ICTs, the evolution of the GNTTO websites and the generation creation of the [www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr) portal in its present-day form; the associated promotional e-tools, such as the monthly newsletter, the my-greece microsite, etc. In addition, the author presented the Organization's online marketing strategy and discussed how this has been systematically implemented with synergies with Google, Yahoo!, Expedia, etc. Last but not least, the author ran through a list of the Social Media platforms the Organization has been using as its most dynamic channels of communication: Facebook, Twitter, etc.

The analysis revealed that the GNTTO has been heavily involved in the practices of eDestination Branding, making full use of all the tools provided by the new technologies and the media. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, this study has been limited to a simple introduction to the existence and the communicative purposes of the above mentioned tools. There are still a number of questions that should be further addressed: (a) how the tourism industry in Greece can benefit from this online activity; (b) how users in the target tourism markets use the technology and whether it meets their expectations about content as well as usability; (c) to what extent this content dissemination influences audiences and turns "friends" and "followers" into actual visitors to Greece, and (d), as tourism becomes the world's largest industry, which online marketing strategies should be further implemented to make Greece a strong competitor in the global tourism market.

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## Endnotes

[1] For these reasons, a destination brand is often built in accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a pyramid where the constituents of the essence of a destination's brand are depicted (cf. UNWTO & ETC, 2010, p. 47).

[2] There is a stark distinction between the use of the terms “tourist” and “traveller”: the first is perceived negatively and considered to care only about the destination, whereas the second is positively valued

suggesting that “(...) the journey itself is the focus, not just arriving at the intended destination” (O’Reilly, 2005, p. 156).

[3] “Many of the sites explored use language that encourage the idea of community identity; the users are not only ‘users’ or ‘tourists’ they are ‘friends’ (Facebook), ‘Producers’ (Travelistic) ‘CouchSurfers’ (Couchsurfing) or ‘experts and members’ (Worldreviewer). Communities can be defined as networks of interpersonal ties. These ties can provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity”, (Munar 2010, p. 9).

[4] These awards are given annually “to recognize and reward people who have contributed most to the creation of online content” (see <http://www.e-awards.gr/>).

[5] “At Google+ we have chosen to focus on the image-oriented features of the platform in order to promote Greece as the ideal tourist destination,” explains the director of advertising Angela Varela.

[6] At the time this case study was published, statistics concerning activity on the GNTO Google+ site showed that: there were more than 750,000 followers, it once gained 18,000 new followers in a single day; the average daily increase in followers was between 3,000 and 10,000; the most popular post recorded 583 +1’s, 145 shares and 169 comments; there was a 35% CTR uplift on an AdWords campaign with social extensions; it was one of the most popular Google+ pages internationally in the travel category.

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