Agile Strategies in eTourism

A case study of Umeå Tourism Information Centre

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate how agile strategies can leverage eTourism and how increasing the use of digital channels can improve the performance of a tourism website. To this end research was conducted into Umeå Tourist Information Centre (UTIC), and data gathered via interviews. Analyzing the results of interviews in light of agile strategies has led to the development of a new tourism model with two main characteristics: First, the model categorizes tourists by type, and facilitates offering information targeted to their specific needs. Second, increasing the use of digital channels such as online presence can improve the performance of a tourism website by taking advantage of visitors’ ideas and their feedback.

Keywords: Agile strategies, eTourism, digital channel, and decision-making.

1. Introduction

In today’s society, tourism has become an important industry for firms as well as for public organizations. The tourism industry contributes to increasing the number of people working in hotels, restaurants and the transportation industry. Tourism is a service industry since it does not produce a product, but rather delivers and transfers services to different types of tourists. It is a combination of a variety of related industries and businesses such as hotels, transportation and restaurants (Terpstra, 2013). It encompasses multiple socio-economic activities that attract people to a particular destination, including accommodation, transportation, entertainment and food. Tourism as an industry is unique, because it benefits local and national economies without exporting national wealth (Puczkó, 2010).

Many years ago, information about a city or a country came from TV advertisements, journals, maps and word of mouth. If a person wanted to travel to a specific country, they typically visited a travel agency to book a hotel, flight, and so on. With the emergence of the Internet, however, the gathering of data and offering of information have changed in a fundamental manner. Now, people rarely call a travel agency to get the information they need, since they can easily find the information they require online.

As a consequence, tourism companies have changed their business model to one based on the Internet and new ICT. The Internet has increased the communication options available. For instance, people now commonly communicate with a travel agency by email and online chat systems, and they can follow events of interest to their travels through social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter.

Previously, tourism companies devoted their efforts to designing and printing a large number of brochures, maps and catalogues which were related to a certain event or season. These catalogues, maps, and brochures were probably not suitable for other seasons or events, and changing the brochures and catalogues was costly. With the advent of the Internet, a company
can modify images and information on their website quickly and with minimal cost.

Nowadays, most cities and countries have tourism websites where information about historical places, religious events, sport matches, galleries, museums, maps, hotels and other useful information can be found. This demonstrates the important role websites have in providing the most important information. Functionality and usability are critically important in web design and visitors expect websites to be attractive, interactive and informative (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Buhalis and Law also classified web service quality into six dimensions: usefulness, responsiveness (specific to mobiles, tablets and laptops), information content, security, ease of use and personalization (Buhalis & Law, 2008, p. 14).

Much has already been said about agile strategies, ICT and tourism. However, very little attention has been paid, in existing research, to applying agile strategies to tourism. This study has aimed to answer the following research question: How can agile strategies leverage eTourism? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to study both eTourism (2.1) and agile strategies (2.2). Data was collected from Umeå Tourist Information Centre (UTIC) (3.2.1) to clarify the following issues: What are the challenges associated with a tourism website? How can UTIC help tourists and be more effective? What are the current digital channels used by UTIC? (4.3).

2. Related research

This section discusses eTourism and tourist behavior (2.1), and agile strategies (2.2). Section (2.1) eTourism and tourist behavior, explains how digital media are used in eTourism (2.1.1) and explores decision-making and reasons for traveling (2.1.2). In the second section, agile strategies (2.2) will be described, explaining how a company can quickly adapt its business model to market changes.

2.1 eTourism and tourist behavior

IT is known for its ability to blur boundaries of different kinds – organizational boundaries (Holmström & Boudreau, 2006; Rönnbäck, Holmström, & Hanseth, 2007) as well as physical boundaries (Levén & Holmström, 2012). In the context of tourism, people using IT can stay at home and see pictures of paintings that are physically situated in museums in Canada¹ or the Louvre in Paris². Since video-conferencing and eLearning tools hold the potential to increase competitive advantages and reduce cost and time spent on educating staff, many industries have turned to these technologies. Actors in the tourism industry can share videos and three-dimensional (3D) media for people who cannot travel to the destination. Westergren & Holmström expressed “The use of IT is a fundamental part of the communications and exchanges that occur when organizational members engage in interactions with others, be they

¹http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/index-eng.jsp
members of the same organization or people from the outside” (Westergren & Holmström, 2012, p. 223).

### 2.1.1 eTourism

As mentioned above, video conferencing holds the potential to increase competitive advantages and also to reduce costs and time spent on staff education. Hence, many industries have turned to using these technologies. Also, people using IT can stay at home and do their daily activities such as online shopping, paying their invoices, watching online movies, communicating with their friends on social networks and so on. Buhalis and Law expressed how obtaining information, maintaining connections, developing relationships, and decision-making for traveling are made easier by a Virtual Travel Community (VTC). Multimedia has a major role to play in tourism because photos and graphics provide a tangible experience to travel planners. Increasingly, video clips or animations can enhance the richness and interactivity of information. Moreover, the Internet can allow people to virtually interact with a destination through 3D virtual tours (Buhalis & Law, 2008). In addition, Buhalis and Law stated that multimedia in a tourism website can produce a telepresence that allows people to experience products and destinations in their homes, without actually visiting a destination.

“Increasingly ICTs will provide the “info-structure” for the entire industry and will overtake all mechanistic aspects of tourism transactions. It is evident, however, that the future of eTourism will be focused on Consumer Centric technologies that will support organizations to interact with their customers dynamically. [...] Agile strategies are therefore required at both strategic and tactical management levels to ensure that the ICT driven opportunities and challenges are turned to the advantage of tourism organizations towards enhancing their innovation and competitiveness” (Buhalis & Law, 2008, pp. 21-22).

In addition, Buhalis and Costa mentioned that technology will be critical for supporting, interconnectivity and interoperability, to sustain an agile network. They also describe how ICTs provide 'info-structure' for tourism and allow tourism suppliers and tourist destinations to increase their efficiency. Innovative tourism operators already have ICT tools available. However, agile strategies are required at both strategic and tactical management levels in order to reap the benefits of these (Buhalis & Costa, 2006).

### 2.1.2 Tourist behavior

A tourist is not simply someone with sunglasses, a camera hanging around their neck, Hawaiian Tee and a straw hat. Clearly there are different reasons for travel, such as leisure, work or study. A tourist might be a businessman, student, worker or a person visiting their family. Different types of tourists will therefore seek specific kinds of information. For instance, a person who visits their family may not necessarily want to know about hotels or universities. However, most types of tourists may want to know the locations of the nearest health center, currency exchange, shopping centers and so on.
• Reasons for travel
As mentioned, there are different reasons for traveling, and these indicate the type of tourist. Samukelo gives the following types of tourists:
Tourists travelling for professional reasons such as business, education, medical and cultural courses. Tourists travelling for leisure and holidays e.g. religious, shopping, sports and special interest tourists. Tourists travelling to visit friends and relatives (VFR). Youth travelers, including both backpackers (they have flexible travel schedules) and gap year travelers (they travel to another country to earn money, have new experiences and learn new skills) (Samukelo, 2013). Since tourists have individual reasons for their travels, they make decisions according to individual factors such as their financial situation, purpose of their holiday, accommodation requirements, and so on.

• Decision-Making
Kartha explains that all of us have faced certain situations in our life where we need to make decisions (Kartha, 2012). There are several ideas about what decision-making actually is. Decision-making is a process in which a person chooses from among several possible options, to reach a desired goal. Decision-making is essential for any tourist (Huitt, 1992). People often try to find useful information to help them make their decisions. There are many factors which can affect the process of decision-making (e.g. money, time and knowledge). External and contextual factors affect the decision-making of tourists (Hedlund, 2013).

The factors influencing vacation choices are given more detail in the following: (a) Choice context: a tourist’s culture and social class, and whether they are visiting family or friends and so forth. It is obvious that people like to travel to new places to learn more about new cultures, languages, people, food, and to visit attractions. (b) Situational: this relates to, for instance, the type of travel, knowing more about destinations and family travel. Obviously, the reasons of traveling differ from one person to other. The reasons of traveling can be visiting family, visiting new places, participating in conferences, medical treatment, visiting religious places, business and so forth. (c) Marketing and the media: this refers to TV advertisements, paper or E-brochures and guidebooks. Some people prefer to use paper brochures and maps to find most of their information. And, most of the time, advertisements can persuade people to consider the destination for their travel. Hence, some people may decide to book a flight and hotel after simply seeing an advertisement.

Hedlund describes some personal determinants that influence a tourist’s decision-making (Hedlund, 2013). These are Circumstances, Knowledge, Psychological and Experience, which are described below. Circumstances (such as leisure and health): most people like to travel to receive positive energy after a period of work. Knowledge (such as considering the price, distance and availability of various tourism products): it is obvious that people consider all aspects of their travel. They consider how they will get to the destination and the duration of the flights. For example, long-distance flights are not popular among older people. Psychological
(such as intentions, values and attitudes, kindness and friendly behaviors): tourists like to travel to a destination where they feel respected. *Experience*: (for instance, different types of destinations, vacations and also the availability of markets) most tourists like to visit new places to have new experiences. They like to become familiar with new cultures, customs and languages.

Kartha says there are six steps or essential techniques in decision-making that help people to make good decisions in their lives (Kartha, 2012). (1) *Define the problem*: obviously, defining the problem is important in solving it. Stating the underlying problem or goal will help people clarify their thoughts. (2) *Develop alternatives*: stating the possible and available alternatives for the particular situation. People can discard the unsuitable alternatives and they may find the solution from these ideas. (3) *Evaluate the alternatives*: this step is difficult, because analyzing the alternatives is what that helps people find the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. Grading the options with numbers can be helpful and can help in the filtering process. (4) *Make the decision*: the results of the previous steps lead to making a proper decision. One of the available alternatives is deemed to be the better solution, and it is selected. (5) *Implement the solution*: finding a good solution is not enough to solve the problem. Execution of the solution is essential for approaching a successful result. (6) *Monitor your solution*: it may be necessary to measure and monitor the implemented result. Decisions can later be changed by monitoring the solution in its early stages to observe any deviance of the results from what was expected.

### 2.2 Agile strategies

Agile strategies are necessary, but insufficient, preconditions to reap the benefits of ICT tools in the tourism industry. ‘Agile’ means addressing how responses to change must be rapid and effective (Pressman, 2009). Agile strategies use a short development life-cycle and aim to deal with unexpected problems (Lin, Poschen, Procter, Goble, Bhagat, & Roure, 2008).

Most companies use agile strategies to manage project risk and improve their return on investment (Druckman, 2010, p. 3). People, manpower, and interaction (e.g. communication) are considered to be more important than technology and process. Increasingly, agile principles also indicate explicitly that customer satisfaction has the highest priority. Continuous delivery of valuable software takes time: from weeks to months; a team should include business people and developers who work together on changing the business model; face-to-face conversation is the most efficient and effective method of conveying information in the team; the team is self-organized and the team manage and design the best structures and so forth (Cunningham, 2001).

An agile organization is defined as one that: adapts its organizational culture to market change, learns about market changes rapidly, takes advantage of these market changes and customizes its products to individual preferences (Desouza, 2007). An agile organization has the ability to take advantage of its opportunities and deploys its tangible and intangible assets in quick time cycles with the lowest possible cost and effort.

Companies need to modify their business models more rapidly, more frequently and more
far-reaching than before when they are faced with disruption, discontinuities, intense global competition and convergence. Business models consist of a set of structural and interdependent operational relations between companies, customers, stakeholders, suppliers and other units or departments. Normally, business models tend to be persistent and difficult to change. This stability is required for efficiency, as traditional management tends to build on routine actions and well-known procedures. This limits the strategic agility of a firm and also its ability to renew and reform itself (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Arvidsson, Holmström, & Lytyinen, 2014). To deal with this challenge, Doz and Kosonen express that there are three ‘meta-capabilities’ in the leadership action agenda for accelerating business model renewal (Doz & Kosonen, 2010): (a) Strategic Sensitivity, (b) Leadership Unity and (c) Resource Fluidity:

(a) Strategic Sensitivity: means a constant awareness of new developments and a readiness to grasp them. Strategic sensitivity lets companies either plan their schedule for their required renewal or transfer of their current business model. In addition, it gives companies opportunities to define their new business model. The strategic sensitivity of an organization can be increased by anticipating, experimenting, distancing, abstracting and reframing.

Anticipating (sharpening foresight): anticipation and foresight allow companies to reform their business model in time to create value and to gain competitive advantages. Foresight is important but unpredictable and cannot be modeled.

Experimenting (gaining insights): experiments may be valuable for a company because they may challenge the business’ imagination and they may change the business model of the company. Consciously planning for experimentation can allow insights from such experiments to be systematically incorporated into adaptations to business models.

Distancing (gaining perspective): “A rich personal network of external professional contacts and a deep understanding of what the organization contributes to customers can help to sustain this ‘outside-in’ perspective” (Doz & Kosonen, 2010, p. 374).

Abstracting (gaining generality): controlling the scope and size of projects and business models by keeping their conceptual essence and contextual dependency may help with strategic agility and business model renewal.

Reframing (imagining new business models): given that it is possible to apply different business models to the same business, distancing and abstracting allow reframing, which is the generation of new perspectives and new alternatives. Being able to create multiple strategic frames for a business model is highly valuable.

(b) Leadership unity: refers to the ability of the leadership team to make decisions rapidly, and abandons the traditional style of top-down management. It shifts team unity and a new
adaptive leadership towards a new business model. Leadership unity relates to the ability and capability of leadership team members to be more understanding and more trusting. So, strategic awareness accelerates business model renewal by a common commitment to abandon the old model and the acceptance of the risks of the new models. The leadership unity of an organization will be increased by dialoguing, revealing, integrating, aligning and caring.

Dialoguing (revealing and sharing assumptions, understanding contexts): traditional management structures are vertical, with little inclusivity and therefore limited motivation of staff. Moreover, if managers act unilaterally and point-score (as in a tennis game), teams become ineffective. So, CEOs should listen to different ideas and allow top executive managers to speak openly and without fear.

Revealing (making personal motives explicit): executives and other staff should be in the habit of feeling able to share their ideas in a welcoming environment. This includes their way of thinking, their particular cognitive biases, aspirations and fears, satisfactions or discomforts. Increasingly, this ‘personal safety’ and mutual respect lets executives reveal their deeper motives and concerns.

Integrating (building interdependencies): when businesses are very interdependent the business model may not be appropriate or effective. In order to connect organizational sub-units to services and digital platforms in new innovative ways, the leadership team must work together to find opportunities for new business development.

Aligning (rallying around a common interest): since aligning is a kind of incentive mechanism, effective leaders can use it to create both emotional and aspirational images. It can be a source of commitment, allowing for similar core beliefs and principles in new business models as those found in old ones.

Caring (providing empathy and compassion for empowerment): companies may reinvent themselves with a new business model when the top manager uses a quality of leadership unity called ‘care’. In this way, members can feel a personal sense of safety, mutual respect and playfulness through companionship and by providing decent health care, and so forth. In addition, some innovative organizations are playful, and tend be flexible with staff roles on their way to explore new business models.

(c)Resource fluidity: refers to the ability to reconfigure and redeploy resources rapidly and widely. It allows firms to reallocate their resources and seize new opportunities. Changing an existing business model is made particularly difficult by inert structures and processes throughout the organization, and evolving complexity within the organization. This problem may
be solved through a variety of leadership actions, and by introducing structural agility. Resource fluidity can be improved by decoupling, modularizing, dissociating, switching and grafting.

Decoupling (gaining flexibility): systems evolve largely because business model rigidity does not always allow system elements to work tightly together. Doz and Kosonen identified “the issue back in the 1960s, and proposed it be addressed via a stable, sheltered ‘technical core’ and a more flexible and adaptive periphery and this prescription remains valid today” (Doz & Kosonen, 2010, p. 378).

Modularizing (disassembling and reassembling business systems): changing a business model is made more affordable and less risky by modularizing fundamental business systems such as processes and IT systems. Obviously, modularizing business systems is limited and it only works with a limited range of activities. Therefore, to assist the implementation of a new business model, a particular combination of business system elements can be assembled.

Dissociating (separating resource use from ownership): there is a tight alignment between the scope of duty of the senior executives, the business model and the boundaries of a business. Companies can break the patterns of individual executive ‘ownership’ and break the alignment between the boundaries of a business and its related business model.

Switching (using multiple models): Doz and Kosonen state “a more radical differentiation and renewal solution is to create different - parallel but separate - business models, and to assign products and market segments flexibly, offering innovators a choice (albeit restricted) of alternative business models” (Doz & Kosonen, 2010, p. 380).

Grafting (acquiring to transform one’s self): transformation is difficult for successful companies, but it can be a worthwhile, and sometimes necessary, risk to introduce a different business model into current operations. Strategic agility is a kind of key solution to this problem.

Desouza describes how flexibility comes with its own associated complexity, and it may be difficult to apply. But agility comes with flexibility. He also states how speed is an important factor in agility, and it is a sort of capability of an organization to execute its operational cycles and decision-making rapidly (Desouza, 2007). Quickness can be applied to the processing time of an order or service request, the time required to market new products, of systems to react to certain changes and so on. Thus, an important advantage for an organization can be the ability to reply to a service request, or process orders in good time.
3. Method

This section describes the research process and it begins with the research approach (3.1), which describes the methods applied in this research to answer the research question. Following this section comes data collection (3.2), which describes the methods of collecting data, and it includes sub-sections Umeå Tourist Information Centre (3.2.1) and tourist behaviors (3.2.2). Later, data analysis (3.3) points at the ways in which the agile strategy concept was used in analyzing the data.

3.1 Research approach

In order to understand how agile strategies leverage eTourism, this study looked at eTourism (2.1) and agile strategies (2.2). More generally, it was decided to study tourism, and in so doing a qualitative approach was adopted. The research strategy was designed to emphasize the perceptions of key stakeholders in the tourism organization and so an interpretive, qualitative mode of inquiry was adopted to sensitively capture the social phenomena under investigation (Klein & Myers, 1999). A qualitative approach was adopted to study phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Holmström, 2005; Holmström & Truex, 2011), which is well aligned with the research question. Hence, a case study was performed on UTIC to understand the challenges associated with a tourism website, and how it may guide tourists and be more effective. In addition, this study investigated tourists’ motivations. This included the reasons for travel and decision-making.

3.2 Data collection

This section describes how and where data was collected and it includes the sub-sections Umeå Tourist Information Centre (3.2.1) and tourist behaviors (3.2.2).

3.2.1 Umeå Tourist Information Centre

Umeå Tourist Information Centre has 12 employees. Some facts about UTIC were received by email (see appendix 1) and are presented in the digital channel section (3.2.1). It was decided to learn about people’s idea and perceptions, and thus data was collected from six qualitative interviews. The interviews lasted from 12 – 24 minutes each, and were recorded on a portable electronic device (via mobile phone). Table 1 shows the interviewees, their respective tasks within UTIC and the duration of each interview.

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3 (a) http://www.visitumea.se/sv/om-oss
(b) http://www.umea.se/umeakommun/kommunochpolitik/kommunensorganisation/namnderochverksamheter/kommunstyrelse/kommunstyrelsensverksamheter/turistbyra/personal.4.bbd1b101a585d704800078781.html
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees and their respective tasks</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager and Marketing</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Information Officer</td>
<td>12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Information Officer</td>
<td>22 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Manager</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Trade and Development Center,</td>
<td>14 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Manager</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Interviewees and their respective tasks within UTIC*

### 3.3 Data analysis

The collected data was divided into two parts: statistical data, and other information obtained through the interviews. The statistical data comes from Google services (Google Analytics) and the Bureau of Statistics, which were both received from UTIC. (see appendix 1). The point was to find the relationship between the number of visitors to the company’s tourism website and the number of actual tourists who visited Umeå each year (between 2008 and 2012). Table 2 shows the data that was sorted based on the year.

All the interviews were conducted and the data was transcribed to text. This data was then sorted into different categories such as the type of tourists, type of data and the type of digital communication channels. The point was to understand the ideas of the employees who work at Umeå Tourist Information Centre. Moreover, the goal was to understand what the challenges are for a tourism company and how a tourism company can convert these challenges into an opportunity to increase the performance of their website. The interviews were focused on digital channels and communications between UTIC and tourists, as well as how the company collects data and provides information to visitors to the website.
Based on the results of the interviews and agile strategies concepts, which were mentioned in section 2.2, the researcher proposed a new tourism model:

3.3.1 Proposing a new tourism model

This study revealed that most tourism website information is related to accommodation, food, events, entertainment and transportation. Tourism companies do not present information according to the type of tourists. For instance, during data collection one of the interviewees at UTIC talked about the type of data that they have: “We do some data collection. It comes from hotels. We are getting information day to day based on how many beds are occupied; how many rooms are occupied. Are they alone or with family?” Other interviewees at UTIC also stated “We have brochures and we have the website frequently updated. Pretty much we have nothing special for different kinds of people. We have data for tourists. [...] So we have about nature, walking, for biking, for events, for activities [...]”. Hence, this paper proposes a tourism model (table 3) based on Experimenting from the agile strategies section (2.2).

3.3.2 Increasing communication channels

The study showed that most tourism websites do not have adequate communication channels. This issue could decrease the effectiveness of a tourism website. Therefore, increasing the communication channels available (e.g. online chat) could correct this deficiency.

Furthermore, agile strategies provide some key strategies that may improve the efficiency of a tourism company’s business model. The communication channels of UTIC are described in terms of Distancing (gaining perspective) and Revealing (making personal motives explicit) (2.2) in the digital channels section (4.3).

3.3.3 Changing the type of information offered

In light of two of the previous sections, Defining a tourism model (3.3.1) and Increasing communication channels (3.3.2); and also based on two issues in agile strategies, “Reframing (imagining new business models)” and “Switching (using multiple models)” (2.2); it seemed a tourism website could offer information organized by tourist type as well as categorizing it under accommodation, food, events, entertainment and transportation. Moreover, increasing the communication channels (such as including pictures and videos to supplement the information for virtual tourism) could improve the efficiency of a tourism website. The section on strategic orientation (4.2) defines a kind of tourism model and also describes the current digital channels at UTIC (4.3). In addition, a tourism website might add some features for increasing the performance of a tourism company, ideas for which are explained in the discussion section (5) with more details in appendix 2.

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4. Results

This research has investigated how applying agile strategies may leverage eTourism, with UTIC as a case study. First, the data from UTIC will be discussed (4.1). Second, the tourism model that was defined will be explained and illustrated (4.2). Finally, the status of UTIC’s current digital channels will be discussed.

4.1 Research setting

Looking at the data analysis section (3.3) and the case study on UTIC (especially table 2), it seems Umeå’s tourism website (visitumea.se) had few visitors compared to the number of tourists who visited the city of Umeå. For instance, there were 173 156 unique visitors to the UTIC website in 2012, whilst 473 563 tourists visited Umeå in the same year. Indeed, less than half of the actual tourists visited UTIC’s website between 2008 and 2012. Table 2 reveals that the numbers of both visitors to the website and actual tourists has increased gradually from 2008 up to 2012. More information can be found in appendix 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type of visit</th>
<th>Unique visits to (UTIC) website</th>
<th>Actual tourists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td></td>
<td>125 176</td>
<td>449 888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
<td>190 485</td>
<td>470 299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>137 186</td>
<td>468 202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
<td>168 270</td>
<td>493 806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>173 156</td>
<td>473 563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Number of visits (UTIC) websites and actual tourists visiting Umeå.

In the interviews employees of UTIC were asked about their work tasks and the role of their office. One said that their role was to answer questions and guide any visitors to Umeå. Different responses included: “We have to support tourism in the community and the community around us”.

“I work pretty much with information, (like a) website, a little bit like Google but with a person and you can ask about Sweden and we try to help them as well as we
can. We work pretty much with guides for trips, activities, what to do in our region, what we are specialized in here in Västerbotten, Umeå. We are probably the people who have biggest knowledge about the region and so people come and ask where something else or where it is”.

“For the website, we always communicate with the companies; what do they want? What do they offer? What do they have with their new website? We reach out to new companies which have shops in the city, or restaurants. They mail us the information (pictures) and we put them on the website. But, it is always what is on in the city and you seek the pictures and everything and you call the companies, mail them or they email you.”

Interviewees were also asked about the different types of tourists visiting Umeå. A selection of the responses follows: “We have all types. We don’t talk about students actually. Students are important as well. There are factories that workers come to as skilled workers and also they have friends here and they come here and definitely there is lots of marketing in tourism”.

“Of course there is medical treatment and others but there are a lot because we have one of the biggest hospitals. We have lots of businessmen for conferences. We have large companies in the city and there are opportunities all over the town and we have tourists for conferences, skilled workers. Workers from Norway, Finland, Germany and Denmark. We have also Volvo in town so a lot of technicians from Germany especially the robots in Volvo they were built by a German company so lots of Germans”.

“The business tourism I would say is the biggest part. If you look at the hotels-between Monday to Friday- they are always crowded with different kinds of tourists. They are a huge one. There are also leisure tourists but I think, if you look at the relationship between tourism and business tourism, I think they are financially the biggest part.”

Interviewees were also asked about what kind of data they have access to and what kind of data they want to have at UTIC. Again, a selection of responses follows: “The best data we have is data which we get from data central ‘turistbyrå’ about guest nights at the hotel and also which country they come from”.

“We do some data collection. It comes from hotels. We are getting information day to day based on how many beds are occupied, how many rooms are occupied. Are they alone or with family? Because if they are alone, they come from a company. Then we are doing complementary events and data from media exposure, data collection as well. We’re gathering information about news media online, not Facebook, not Twitter or YouTube. [...] We have the Internet, we put it into the
search engine and we get everyday information. [...] We get data collection from hotels. We do not know actually if the people think about hotels, the reasons for travel, the reason they chose the hotel, what age they are, if they are interested to come back, why they are interested to come back. Now we get the hotel information, we can look what's happening in Umeå, then we can think about it, well this amount of people like that. I would like to have the specific information, maybe checking information with the hotel. You have the option to answer the questions, you have internet, it’s quick and we get very exact information. It could be one kind of data that I want to have”.

Obviously, there are different types of tourists who visit Umeå and the study shows that UTIC offers the information they require; on their website as well as in brochures, maps and booklets. Therefore, the next section (4.2) defines a tourism model and explains why it might be helpful for a tourism company. Since receiving the correct data is important to Umeå Tourist Information Centre, their current digital channels are also explained (4.3).

**4.2 Strategic orientation and tourist types**

This section states, firstly, the reasons why it was decided to propose a new tourism model. Secondly, it describes the advantages of the tourism model and, finally, it illustrates and interprets the model. Based on the studies about *eTourism and tourist behavior* (2.1) and based on the results of interviews with some employees at UTIC, it seems the notion of tourism is complex and there are different types of tourists. For this reason, a model of tourism was proposed which facilitates offering information to tourists.

The model has the following advantages: on the one hand, the tourism model can be helpful because tourism companies can be sure that they *gather* information for all types of tourists (for each step of their travel). On the other hand, the tourism model can also be beneficial for better *offering* information tailored to particular types of tourists. Thus, tourists can easily find most of the required information (from the beginning to the end of their travels) in a shorter time. Moreover, a tourism company can receive valuable information by analyzing the related pages that are visited by tourists. The visited pages may reveal facts about what type of tourist they are. Thus, tourist companies can take advantage of the statistics and plan for the future by evaluating the number of pages that are visited by each type of tourist.

During the study, it became clear that UTIC has the abilities, capabilities and experiences to offer the required information to tourists, but it does not focus on different types of tourists. For instance, one of the interviewees at Umeå Tourist Information Centre said “*We have brochures and we have our website frequently updated. Pretty much we have nothing special for different kinds of people. We have data for tourists. […] So we have about nature, walking, for biking, for events, for activities […]*”. Yet, as mentioned earlier in “*Experimenting*” in agile strategies (2.2) *Experimenting*: experiments may be valuable for a company because they may challenge
the business’ imagination and they may change the business model of the company. In other words, experimentation may be able to unleash this unrealized potential.

As mentioned, UTIC has a lot of experience and has the potential to offer the required information to the right tourists but it does not concentrate on different types of tourists. According to “Experimenting”, a tourism company can concentrate on different types of tourists and gather the information that each type of tourist may look for. A tourism company can apply the tourism model which I define in this section. By doing this, the tourism company may gain the following advantages: data can be gathered and sorted by type of tourist; the required data may be easily searched, added to, modified or updated; and a tourism website can directly offer information tailored to different types of tourists.

Thus, by adopting the ideas from “Experimenting” in agile strategies (2.2) and also by considering reasons for travel, decision-making stages and types of tourists, a new tourism model is proposed in this research. This model can be applied to either gathering data or offering information. The proposed tourism model is outlined in table 3. The rows include decision-making stages and the columns include the reasons for travel (table 3). Reasons for travel and decision-making stages were categorized before the tourism model was defined, in the strategic orientation section (4.2).

The model is a kind of framing that looks like a particularly good idea for the information provision process. It is useful in terms of building up or improving a database for a tourism website. The rows of the tourism model table show the stages of decision-making, which are explained below:

- **Potential** (the destination and dates are not decided): A potential tourist might be at home eating breakfast with their family, with no plans to travel. When they see an advertisement about, for example, Umeå in Sweden, they may consider traveling there. Thus, advertising plays a big and important role at this stage, and potential tourists may search on the Internet for more information about Umeå.

- **Probable** (dates are not yet determined): many factors that may affect travel, such as free time and financial status, may be considered. Moreover, the future tourist may search for more information based on their reasons for traveling. For instance, students who want to study in Sweden must meet all the requirements, such as IELTS score, application deadline and so on. They may need to register early for accommodation, as well.

- **Decided**: in this stage, the tourist has decided to travel to a certain place at a certain time in the future (e.g. to Umeå over the Christmas holidays). They may decide on traveling over a number of public holidays at Christmas and plan how they will organize their time and expenses. In addition, they may search for other information such as the cost of living, accommodation, transport and so on.

- **Planning to travel**: having decided to travel to Umeå, the tourist will probably seek more information to help plan the trip. They may, for instance, search the Internet to find information about suitable accommodation, appropriate flights, immigration rules, Umeå University and so forth.
• Pre-travel: in this stage, tourists may reconfirm their flights and hotel and may try to find important information such as what documents might be required. For instance, if they are traveling for leisure they may seek out monthly weather forecasts and currency information.

• At location (actual tourist): the tourist has arrived at their destination (e.g. Umeå). They may search for common information about things such as local markets, restaurants, museums, clinics, pharmacies, and parking, fairs, attractions, nightclubs and car rental. They may also try to find specific information related to their reason for traveling. For instance, a businessman may search for information related to their business. They may wish to extend their visa; so they will search for information about this, and for the location of the immigration office.

• Leaving (returning home): in this stage, the tourist will leave Umeå. The person may try to find some information such as the location of local markets to buy some souvenirs; transportation; currency exchange; and so forth.

The columns of the table show types of tourists or reasons for travel (see table 3) which are described below:

• Visiting family: obviously, the destination and the reason for travel are pre-determined. One or more persons will visit their relatives or friends. It is obvious that they do not usually need to book a hotel. They may search for some information about the location of market places to buy souvenirs, local attractions and natural parks, car rental (boats or cruises), restaurants, gyms, theaters and the cinema.

• Mission travel: there is difference between mission travel and work or business travel. Mission travel means the traveler has a mission to participate in a meeting at a university or an international conference, etc.

• Student travel: the tourist has been admitted to a University (e.g. Umeå University) to study in a single course or in a program for a certain period of time. They may look for information on validating their certification at www.hsv.se, renting an apartment, the tax office, insurance, local clinics, employment offices, the immigration office, second-hand shops, gyms, clubs, driving licenses and opening a bank account.

• Work travel: some countries such as Canada and Australia hire skilled workers. In some countries, some companies (e.g. in Sweden) hire foreign employees for a short period for specific jobs such as cutting trees in winter. Sweden also hires skilled workers and these tourists may seek information about this.

• Business travel: a traveler may travel to a destination for business purposes. For instance, there are some big international companies in Sweden such as Scania, Saab, Eriksson and Volvo that businessmen will come to visit. There are things businessmen may search for such as the date of international fairs, information on how to open an office or begin a business in Sweden, information about labor laws, and so on.

• Medical treatment travel: there is collaboration and coordination between hospitals and doctors around the world. They may refer their patients for specialist medical treatments. Since
there is a big hospital in Umeå (especially Norrbotten\(^5\)), patients may travel to Umeå for medical treatment.

- Transient tourist: tourists traveling to a certain destination may stay in another city in between. For instance, if they have planned to go to a certain destination by car but the car has problems, they may stay in another city. Those who travel by bicycle, motorbike or motor-home (“husbil”) may stay at any city before their final destination. Transient tourists may try to find information about car mechanics, camping and local markets.

- Virtual tourist: these have no plans or even opportunity (e.g. no money or no time) to travel to a certain destination. Thus, they maybe limited to seeing interesting pictures and watching some interesting video clips about the destination.

To better understand the types of tourism the tourism agency deals with, the reasons for travel are outlined in the columns and the tourists’ decision-making stages are in the rows (table 3). The model which is illustrated in table 3 is a kind of framing that is a particularly good idea for the information provision process. It is useful in terms of building up or enhancing a database for a tourism website. To minimize complexity, the number of decision-making stages was reduced, and virtual and transient tourists are not mentioned in the model. Each cell of the table will be filled with information relevant to each type of tourist, at each stage of their travel. Each traveler moves from the top down in their respective column, chronologically. In addition, there may be more than seven decision-making stages. Some cells may include the same information, or some may be blank.

\[^5\) http://www.vll.se/default.aspx?id=25719&refid=1926

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Tourists (Reasons for travel)</th>
<th>Leisure travel</th>
<th>Family, relative and friends travel</th>
<th>Mission travel</th>
<th>Student travel</th>
<th>Work travel</th>
<th>Business travel</th>
<th>Medical treatment travel</th>
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<td>Decision-making stages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential (dates and destination are not decided)</td>
<td>L1</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>W1</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>MT1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Stage 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probable (dates)</td>
<td>L2</td>
<td>F2</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>W2</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>MT2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Shows a tourism model based on decision-making stages and types of tourists.

- Interpreting the model
To better understand table 3, two rows (stage one and two) and one column (leisure travel) will be discussed as examples. In stage one (potential tourist), the destination and dates of travel are not yet determined. Thus, advertisements may persuade the potential tourist to consider traveling (cell L1). Increasingly, advertisements aimed at work travelers (in stage one), may include information about organizations, factories and industries which are looking for skilled workers (cell W1). The cell for family travel (in stage one) may be blank, because these travelers may not respond to advertising at this stage (cell F1). This demonstrates that the type of advertising and the set of information may differ in each cell in the first row (stage one).

In stage two (probable tourist), the destination has been determined but the travel dates are not. For instance, a tourist maybe traveling to a country for leisure. Hence, they may seek information about the price of flights, cost of rooms, events and festivals or concert schedules (cell L2). A person who travels for business may search for information such as the dates of international fairs and tenders (cell B2). In the column for medical treatment travel (cell M2), decision-making about the date of travel depends on the type of illness, the financial status of a patient and so on. Thus, cell M2 may include information about hospitals, flights, accommodation and so forth.
To further clarify the tourism model (table 3), a more specific example is given for the stages of decision-making for one column, or one type of tourist (e.g. leisure travel).

In stage three (decided), a person has decided to travel to Umeå (e.g. at Christmas) and the person may try to find information about visas, the cost of living, accommodation and local attractions (cell L3). At stage four (planning to travel), the person who is eligible (e.g. has a visa) to travel to the destination, may book flights, a room in a hotel, local tours, concerts, events and so on (cell L4). In pre-travel or stage five (cell L5), the person may seek information about the limitations and conditions of travel such as medicines, insurance and validity of their driving license. In stage six (actual tourist), the person has arrived at the destination (e.g. in the hotel). They may search for information about the nearest clinic, pharmacy, car or motorbike rental, boat or cinema (cell L6). Finally, in stage seven (returning home), the person is preparing to return to their home country and they may be looking for information about souvenirs, discounts for tourists under 90 days, customs, import/export regulations and so on (cell L7).

4.3 The current digital channels used by UTIC

During the research study, interviewees at Umeå Tourist Information Centre spoke about the communication channels at UTIC:

“The most important thing is the communication channels [...] we are trying to help them as fast as possible. [...] We get data collection from hotels. We do not know actually if the people think about hotels, the reason for travel, the reason they chose the hotel, what age they are, if they are interested to come back, why they’re interested to come back. Now we get the hotel information, we can look what’s happening in Umeå, then we can think about it, well, this amount of people like that. I would like to have the specific information, maybe checking information at the hotel. You have the option to answer the questions, you have internet, it’s quick and we get very exact information. It could be one data that I want to have. [...] We try to be more proactive and communicate with our potential customers. But I think this is something where we can develop. This is my personal opinion but I think that we can develop. Because the communication landscape is developing so fast. [...] I think that we need to improve how we communicate with digital channels. [...] We always appreciate people who communicate with information, pictures at Facebook, Twitter and we try to Tweet it and set it in some ways. We need to do some social media competitions like a photo competition”.

Other interviewees also spoke about contributions (uploading media) from people to UTIC: “Actually lots of people do this, they can transfer their media by communicating with Facebook and Instagram. We cannot be everywhere and somebody can take a nice picture and send it to us [...]”. Several explained the different types of communication channels between UTIC and tourists “ [...] website is the most important. And also we have Facebook which is quite international. We have also Instagram; they can follow us. We have also Twitter which is not
for tourists, or maybe a tourist coming here gets more information about the media, local and international”.

“ [...] they can also mail us, attach a file, but we do not know really what to do. Like put up good memories, photos something like that, mainly we use photos for activities and events, we show what it is, otherwise like a photo bank or something like that we have used that but of course it could be something interesting. Every day we modify the website if something new comes up directly on to the webpage. That is always the first. And very welcome up”.

They also explained their ideas about online presence: “We have no online chat now, we are very aware that this is important and it is possible and the fact that it is not free even if it is free. [...] you (UTIC) need to have something new and you have to be active”.

“At this point, we have different workshops with Facebook to express ourselves but it is not that working yet but (we) teach new staff how to use Facebook and teach them how to keep it always updated. There is much information we appreciated but quite late and we get it fast and put it out to all visitors. Phone calls are on-time but emails take a few hours, we answer to all emails before we close”.

It is obvious that there are some tourist offices that have an online presence that includes online chat (e.g. in Malmö6) but they may have human resource restrictions. Therefore, they cannot support their customers or visitors after work hours, at weekends or holidays. Distancing (gaining perspective) and Revealing (making personal motives explicit) in the agile strategy section (2.2) show that applying a series of changes to the website may improve either the attraction of tourists or the offering of information.

5. Discussion

This paper has presented a case study of how digital channels are used by tourism companies, especially at UTIC. The study revealed that digital channels have played a key role in a tourism website. IT has widely affected modern life and changed business, social communications and so on.

The findings reveal that a tourism website may improve its performance by changing or modifying some features of its business model.

First, tourism is complex and a tourist is not simply someone with sunglasses, a camera hanging around their neck, Hawaiian Tee and a straw hat. Rather, there are several types of tourists and they have different reasons for traveling. For this reason, a tourism model based on different types of tourists was proposed.

Second, based on the agile strategies of distancing and revealing (see 2.2) and considering the essence of the internet is connection through digital channels, current digital channels at UTIC (4.3) were studied, and it was shown that increasing digital channels may involve adding some features such as: (a) more languages, (b) Increasing online presence (e.g. online chat), (c) receiving tourists’ ideas (feedback), (d) uploading of media such as picture and video by web users and (e) receiving new ideas from web specialists such as web developers, designers and architects.

The tourism model was developed by applying the agile strategy of experimenting (see 2.2) and the result of interviews. As mentioned, the tourism model (table 3.) can be helpful for a tourism company either collecting data or offering information. Most tourism websites offer information categorized by accommodation, food, events, transportation and entertainment. Based on the agile strategies of switching and reframing (see 2.2) the ideas for offering information based on tourist types, and increasing digital channels (appendix 2), were presented.

An agile organization has the ability to take advantage of its opportunities and deploy its tangible and intangible assets quickly and with the least cost and effort. Moreover, an agile organization is defined as one that adapts its organizational culture to market changes, learns from market change rapidly, takes advantage of this market change, and customizes its products to individual preferences (Desouza, 2007). Increasingly, business models include a set of structural and interdependent operational relations between companies, customers, stakeholders, suppliers and other units or departments. Normally, business models tend to be persistent and difficult to change. This stability is required for efficiency, as traditional management tends to build on routine actions and well-known procedures. However, this limits the strategic agility of a firm and also its ability to renew and reform itself (Doz & Kosonen, 2010).

After considering the collected data on the current digital channels used by UTIC (4.3), it was deemed that the digital channels of the company could be improved by adding or modifying some features. For instance, UTIC's website offers information in Swedish, English, German and some in Finnish languages. Adding more languages (e.g. Spanish, Chinese and Arabic) to the tourism website may facilitate offering information to people who do not know Swedish, English or German. Fortunately, online translators such as Google Translate convert text to other languages but they are not hundred percent accurate. Thus, adding more languages may be a significant means of increasing the communication channels on the website.

Further, as one of the interviewees described, tourists may fill out an online questionnaire (which could be available at hotels) and it would provide valuable data for the tourism company. For instance, tourists could explain their reasons for traveling, the duration of their travels, their experience of the city, the type of information which they require and so on. In this way the tourism company could also add some features by which visitors could freely share their ideas (see appendix 2, new ideas under ‘Friends’) and their experiences of the city. This feedback may be valuable information not only for the tourism company but also for future visitors. Some companies are already communicating with UTIC, as an interviewee said:
We have advisors, we have our own entry. Then, we have also (the information from others) but that is not true visitors. It is for companies. We have a form (on the website) if we have events (e.g. music events), in town. Then you can fill in the form and send it us and we put it on the website. Companies that make events or promotions want to have a channel out to visitors and people in Umeå.

It could be helpful if the tourism company adds a feature by which people can upload their media such as pictures and videos (see appendix 2, ‘Contribute’ under ‘Friend’). A website administrator or a responsible person could organize the media and put them in the proper sections (for example the ‘virtual tourist’ section). People who do not have the opportunity to visit the city could visit the ‘virtual tourist’ section. They could, thereby, experience the destination by seeing the pictures and watching the videos found there. One of the members of UTIC stated that “we always appreciate people who communicate with information, pictures at Facebook, Twitter and we try to Twit it and set it in some ways. We need to do some social media competitions like photo competitions”.

As illustrated in appendix 2, adding a ‘Friend’ feature to the website lets web developers, designers and architects leave their ideas. They could coordinate and collaborate with the tourism company by expressing their ideas to improve the performance of the tourism website. As mentioned under Distancing in agile strategies, Doz and Kosonen note that a rich personal network of external professional contacts and a deep understanding of what the organization contributes to customers can help to sustain this ‘outside-in’ perspective (Doz & Kosonen, 2010, p. 374).

Increasing online presence in a tourism website is one of the important factors that revealed at this research. It is apparent that there are some tourism companies which have an online presence such as online chat (e.g. in Malmö) but they may have human resource restrictions. Thus, supporting their customers or visitors may be difficult after work hours, on weekends or on holidays.

Most tourism websites offer information categorized generally, under accommodation, food, transportation and events or entertainment. It seems that offering information organized by tourist type could be more effective (table 3). Because different people have different requirements (e.g. a student’s requirements differ from the requirements of a businessman). For instance, students do not necessarily search for hotels; rather, they may try to find information about renting apartments, about universities, insurance, employment offices or the tax office. One of the interviewees at Umeå Tourist Information Centre said “we have brochures and we have our website frequently updated. Pretty much we have nothing special for different kind of people. We have data for tourists. [...] So we have about nature, walking, for biking, for events, for activities [...]. Yet, categorizing the data based on the type of tourist could be more effective and helpful. Appendix 2 illustrates the new ideas whereby the tourism website could offer information targeted to specific types of tourists but also information listed by accommodation, food, transportation and events or entertainment.
There were limitations in this research. The researcher's background was not tourism and few people at UTIC were interviewed. Furthermore, this research presents some ideas that each tourist office can apply, but it cannot guarantee that they will attract more visitors or tourists. However, these ideas may improve the performance of a tourism website and may facilitate offering information to people. This research may be helpful for tourism students and researchers who want to research agile strategies in tourism.

6. Conclusions

While researchers have already investigated agile strategies, ICT and tourism, very little attention in existing research has been paid to applying agile strategies to tourism. This study has analyzed how digital channels are used in tourism companies, especially at UTIC, and how tourism companies may improve their efficiency by applying the capabilities of agile strategies. This research has aimed to answer the following research question: How can agile strategies leverage eTourism? For this reason eTourism, tourist behavior, agile strategies and digital channels have all been studied. Data was gathered from Umeå Tourist Information Centre, as a case study, to understand the challenges associated with a tourism website and how it may guide tourists and be more effective.

The findings revealed that a tourism website may improve its performance by modifying some features, and its business model. Hence, this research has provided two significant ideas to a tourism company: first, it reveals the importance of digital channels which can improve the performance of a tourism website. Second, it has presented a tourism model (table 3) that can be applied for both gathering data and offering information. The tourism model can be helpful because it can allow tourism companies to be sure that they have gathered all types of information for all types of tourists (for each step of their travel). The tourism model can also be beneficial for better targeting of information to each type of tourist. Thus, tourists will easily be able to find most of the information they require (from the beginning until the very end of their travels), in a shorter time. Furthermore, tourism companies will gain valuable information by analyzing the related web pages visited by tourists. The visited pages may reveal facts about which type of tourists they are. Thus, tourism companies will be able to plan for the future by evaluating the number of pages that are visited based on the type of tourists visiting them. Finally, this research presented some ideas that may improve existing communication channels and facilitate the use of new ones.

These findings enhanced the researcher's understanding of how agile strategies may improve the performance of a company (especially a tourism company). There are limitations in this research, because few employees at UTIC were interviewed and the researcher's background was not in tourism. It is hoped that this research may guide future researchers who want to continue their research about IT, tourists and agile strategies.
References


Appendix 1: UTIC statistics
Appendix 1: UTIC statistics
Appendix 1: UTIC statistics
Appendix 2: Some ideas for a tourism website