LGBT Tourism: The Competitiveness of the Tourism Destinations Based on Digital Technology

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Abstract. In this article, we present the literature review on the influence of LGBT consumers on tourism. Several authors demonstrate the clear relationship between countries progressive policies towards LGBT people and the economic benefits for their tourism sector, and the increasing social benefits as a result from the associated brand image of tolerance, inclusiveness and diversity. LGBTs are a community with a strong sense of identity, constantly sharing experiences and information and in constant virtual interaction, use all the available means of communication, especially the communication channels and online platforms, developed specifically for this community, such as online associations and forums, specialized websites and apps, and several social networks. Those responsible for marketing, tourism products and services, have been increasingly committed to reaching this target through the several online communication channels. Nonetheless, international publications point to the need for even more products and websites designed and directed to this type of customers. Information and communication technologies modifies the interaction with the individual or institutional clients and enables the adoption of innovative business models and electronic sales channels of tourism products. The role of the ICT in tourism has become an essential tool in today's world of quick information, especially regarding LGBT tourist's options.

Keywords: Information and communication technologies · Internet
Tourism · E-tourism · LGBT

1   Introduction

Tourism is an industry with its own characteristics, with great importance in the economy of many countries, including Portugal [28], based on its high potential for generating income and employment, contributing to the increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) of each country [23, 24]. To many countries, tourism plays an important role in generating revenue for the nation. Tourism is a major export industry for many countries and cities [35] and as an important and necessary industry, it is considered a sector of the economy that can benefit from the various technological resources available [18]. Despite all the political, economic and social instability, people continue to feel like traveling. The use of Information and Communication Technologies can provide competitive advantages in promotion, as well as strengthen the strategies and operations of the tourism industry [9].

If we make an historical analysis about tourism development, it is closely linked to technological evolution. [34] evidences that tourism adds a variety of services that can benefit from Information and Communication Technologies such as: accommodation services that include hotels, apartments, residences and villages; catering services, including restaurants and cafés; transport services including trains, buses, taxis and aviation companies; tourist support services such as insurance companies and exchange offices; recreational services such as sports centers, swimming pools, marinas and golf courses; attractions services such as museums, parks, gardens, monuments and con- ference centers; entertainment services including casinos, cinemas, clubs and theaters. The tourism industry shows a special interest in the change of behaviors, with the objective of adapting its offer, for each segment of demand, through studies that reveal behavioral characteristics of the tourists. Considered a new way of life, tourist desti- nations and Destination Management Organizations (DMO's) and all its components need to perceive these characteristics to be able to adapt their methods of marketing products and services [31]. Nowadays, the LGBT segment acts as a community not only because they are united by the sense of identity, but also because they share experiences, knowledge and communications. The exchange of their experiences and knowledge about travel and tourism has a great impact on the community around the world, since they use common platforms and communication channels created by the same community. It is well known that LGBT tourists make effective use of com- munication channels, whether they are online channels (Facebook, specialized appli- cations, specialized websites, etc.), or offline (magazines, newspapers, brochures, etc.). knowledge creation and self-segmentation that is reflected in the choice of destinations [40]. Destinations and companies should be aware of the need for specialized infor- mation for this market, but above all they should be aware of the existing exchange of information and knowledge and of the virtual interaction of the LGBT community, since it can be defined as a network [40]. Today, the forums for public discussion of any subject are the partner networks. In addition to the direct consumer marketing opportunities they present, social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Weibo are instilling major changes in the quality of life of LGBT people around the world and enabling online communities to form around interests and organizations [40]. The world's largest social networks are being used by brands and destinations that wish to

directly appeal to LGBT consumers, whether to promote hotel brand campaigns or to promote inspiring travel and destinations through engaging photos on Instagram [39, 40]. This analysis seeks to understand the role of Information and Communication Technologies and the Internet in most of the activities associated with the tourism sector and tourism destinations competitiveness, based in LGBT consumers as tourists, in a demanding, quirky, expanding market segment with strong purchasing power.

2   Technological Development: The Internet

As [21] points out, Information and Communication Technologies have a strong influence on people's daily lives. The current society is somehow linked to a concept of knowledge-based economy, a "(…) economy that is focused on knowledge and information as bases of production, productivity and competitiveness" [12]. Essential, today, is to carry out a correct use, research, storage and processing of information, making it essential to learn how to deal with technology and with all the information that is available. People have to follow properly the innovations towards effective integration into the labor market and services. On the other hand, and as [38] concern, wealth creation must be the relationship between individuals and institutions, as well as the ability to manage the existing means and resources in the territory. Technological development has contributed to several changes that occur in society and in people's behaviors, particularly in how we communicate, how people behave and interact in society [13], as well as in the way we seek products, services and information [12, 24]. For many tourists, technology represents an opportunity to actively participate in the destination activities and to take part personally in the construction of their own experience [24]. Likewise, they place special emphasis on sharing their experience with other tourists and residents, and are therefore willing to activate conversation processes through social media with the destination using electronic devices [24], with their family, friends or anonymous users [6, 29]. In this sense, it has been shown that the most valued experiences are those co-created with tourists and supported by high levels of technology [29]. As argued by [23, 24], ICTs are extremely useful because they facilitate encounters between tourists and the destination, and improve the experiential process in time and space.

[1, 2, 23, 25] refer that information and communication technologies have not only changed the way people conduct their activities, but also the mobilization of material and immaterial resources, the way in which generates wealth and how negotiated opportunities are created and expanded. [37] emphasize that "the internet, today, represents one of the main information and communication technologies. This new tool works, through thousands of interconnected computers, around the world, enabling data exchange and information provided in a large network". To [5] the internet, with regard, specifically, to tourism, has changed profoundly the way tourists access to information, plan their trips, make reservations, and share their travel experiences. The internet and other interactive technologies, in addition to causing changes in the behavior of people drive changes in the market, in particular the tourism market, enabling the global distribution of tourist services [10, 11, 23]. Technologies use makes the market more competitive and more accessible to the user [41]. [30, 39], assumes

that the internet and tourism are ideal partners. The internet meets the needs of the tourists of the 21st century, increasingly demanding, informed and sophisticated.

As says [1, 26], the Internet enables a wide social network (virtual), linking the various subjects by the most diverse forms, astonishing speed and in most cases, a synchronous interface, giving a new concept of social interaction. By reducing geographical distances between tourism companies and customers, creates greater flexibility, mobility, elasticity and efficiency in business. In order to take full advantage of this communication tool, agents and promoters in the hotel sector must centralize their core business by making proposals, on the internet, based on flexibility models, speed, utility and imagination. On the other hand, [27] emphasize that the Internet allows tourism providers to be in the same place as their clients or potential clients, and to understand their attitudes, needs, interests, choices and requirements. Technologies promote the exchange of information which is essential for tourism [4]. Using the internet tourists have immediate access to useful information, varied destinations, and the possibility of making reservations in an easier and faster way. Particular attention should be given to changes in market needs, triggered by technological innovations [10] and, especially to a new market resource, the mobility and ubiquity allowed by the spread of smartphones and the emergence of QR codes that contextualize the mobile applications and services and renew the discussion about the importance of the destination strategy.

Tourism companies, feeling the need to adapt to technological development, included the technologies in their business processes, and thus emerged the e-Tourism. According to [7] e-Tourism represents all aspects of tourism that involve and promote the integration of information and communication technologies, revolutionizing the strategic relations of tourism organizations and all of its stakeholders [9]. The concept of e-Tourism encloses all functions of business such as e-commerce, email marketing, electronic production, as well as the electronic strategy, electronic planning and management for all sectors in the tourism industry [9], grouping, also according to the same authors, three main areas: business management, information systems and tourism management. [8] highlight that e-tourism is a result of the scanning of all processes and the value chain of the tourism sector, in particular travel, hotel and restaurant management. E-tourism, is also the result of the fact that we live in the age of wireless communication and that tourists use their mobile devices with internet access before, during and after their trips [22].

2.1 The Use of Internet by LGBT Tourists

[39] demonstrates the clear relationship between countries progressive policies towards LGBT people and the economic benefits for their tourism sector, and the increasing social benefits as a result from the associated brand image of tolerance, inclusiveness and diversity. There are numerous cities considered "gay friendly" around the world, such as Amsterdam, Berlin, Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Chicago and San Francisco. The city of Porto is also becoming a destination of choice and this year has launched a LGBT Guide called Porto Gay Circuit, which is a website where it is possible to find information on places to visit in the city, from bars and nightclubs, restaurants, accommodation, culture, shops, saunas and finally services. Its purpose is to promote

products and services, and places guaranteed to provide a quality service regardless of gender or sexual preference. For Barcelona there is also the site called Gay Barcelona, similar to Porto Gay Circuit, with more information and a list of gay events in the city for the coming months. Travel Gay Europe contains information about Amsterdam and other destinations around the world, presenting information from accommodation, catering, bars and entertainment, shops, gymnasiums, city maps, gay event dates and other. These websites state that LGBT consumers use the internet and their tools to choose and plan their holiday destination. There is also a website called Datesetters that works as a search engine of a destination according to preferences, holidays with interest in gastronomy, luxury holidays, gay holidays, health and well-being. By choosing any of the aforementioned products, they choose the destination where they want to go on vacation, and the site redirects to the options that are part of the Datesetters world. Directly with the Hotels, without intermediaries. In the digital age, where the use of digital tools is recurring around the world, it is not surprising that there are specific sites frequently used by the LGBT segment. Some authors point out that there are still few studies on gay tourism, and few media talking about this issue, considering only LGBT activism as the main producer of social discourse [19]. LGBT tourism has grown significantly in recent years. Gradually, this dynamic segment has proven its ability to become a powerful vehicle for economic development. However, the positive impacts of LGBT tourism outweigh the economic benefits. In fact, welcoming destinations of this type of tourism convey a powerful image of tolerance and respect. LGBT tourism contributes to increasing the visibility, role and recognition of LGBT people and benefits destinations by associating their brand image with acceptance, inclusion and diversity [40].

According to [19], the LGBT sphere is a complete and dynamic theme that surpasses the strictly activist world and includes at least the following elements: digital practices (pages of activists, other platforms and web pages), social groups LGBT sections in political parties and trade unions and other non-governmental organizations, among others), physical spaces (such as the seat of associations), meetings, places (bars and discos), collective actions and commemorations of the Stonewall revolts (Pride LGTB) that takes place in more than thirty spanish cities with their respective speeches and practices. With the continuous shift from travel and tourism marketing to online platforms, destinations are increasingly competing in a global marketplace. Due to the continued growth of world tourism activity, destination marketers have sought to make their destinations attractive to particular consumer segments, particularly those segments that travel more frequently and have higher levels of spending, such as LGBT travelers. Marketing campaigns aimed at the gay and lesbian public should be factors to take into account because, according to [20], they function as an official invitation to this market segment that, for various reasons, may not know the destination and if it is well coming at it.

According to [17], advertising and the press dedicated to gay tourism are an important source of information in the election and choice of the right destination to travel. One of the main tour guides for the gay community (studied by these authors) is Spartacus, which offers destinations worldwide accessible to this segment of the tourism market. The benefits of a good marketing campaign are diverse: a strong presence in a profitable market, building a good image and a loyal consumer base,

arouses the interest of clients who care about the ethical codes of LGBT, public marketing encourages a tolerant work environment and enhances its moral and the companies as important members of the team. Concerning public investment in gay marketing, it creates the message of a government that cares about the welfare and representativeness of all its citizens [14, 15].

According to [17], in Spain there are several web pages related to this segment of tourism. In this study were considered pages of seven groups of activists. Two pages in Madrid (COGAM, FELGTB), two in Barcelona (Cogailes, FAGC), one in Andalusia (Girasol), one in Valencia (Lambda) and one federation of Associations (Colegas). In addition to these online pages, other digital resources have emerged, specialized in LGBT related topics, being the same blogs and web pages as Bitter Peel, Gay Universe, Opposite, Gay Entertainment, Dos manzanas, and AmbienteG. These sites are the most important sources with digital information about news, events and private actions related to the LGBT community.

The social changes and improvements in legal recognition and protection of LGBT people around the world mean that LGBT people have become more visible as an important segment of consumption to capture and develop in these a sense of loyalty to ensure repeated visits to the destination [40]. LGBT consumers tend to have higher levels of income and thus tend to spend more than ordinary consumers in discretionary categories such as travel, fashion and entertainment. According to [32], this segment is one of the most important economically. In the United States alone, the gay, bisexual and bisexual community are approximately 15 million people from different ethnic backgrounds who are single and are organized into families composed of the elderly. In 2002 they spent 451 million US dollars. As of that year, this value has always been increasing. According to [32], the LGBT public is generally quite numerous and has a more consumeristic lifestyle, most of them have no children or traditional family expenses. This segment has a high purchasing power. The term DINK (Dual Income, No Kids) is often used to characterize the gay profile [39]. Among some studies on this subject, there seems to be a consensus regarding the profile of the gay individual in the Western world - gay men (more than women) have high incomes, are educated and skilled workers, without children, have more time available to them and have attitudes and interests that characterize them as individuals, being sophisticated and high-spending consumers [20].

According to [16] the economic condition is a fundamental element in the segregation of individuals in urban space. Thus, LGBT consumers have a socioeconomic pattern that allows them to be inserted in these environments for LGBT nightlife. This growing phenomenon has made the US tourism industry - from travel agencies, hotels and flights - show a strong interest in gay tourism, which represents a market that exceeds $ 54 billion a year, or 10% of the industry [40]. According to CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey - 2016, 37% of US respondents had an annual income of more than $ 100,000. The same study estimates that the annual economic impact of LGBT tourists alone in the US already represents, currently more than $ 75 billion. The CMI study (2016) (Table 1) shows that 72% of respondents performed between 2 to 9 leisure trips in the last 12 months and 26% made 1 to 2 business trips. While 41% made between 1 and 3 leisure trips with the use of airplanes and 58% of those surveyed said that during their leisure travels they stayed between 6

and 15 nights in a hotel. According to IGLTA (International Gay and Lesbian Association), this market segment refers to the development and commercialization of tourism products and services for lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transsexuals. Some products and services are designed specifically for LGBT travelers, e.g. honeymoon and wedding ceremonies, accommodation or tours designed for groups of homosexuals or lesbian women. Travel destinations or service providers (e.g. airlines, hotel chains) seek to ensure that LGBT consumers when visiting their destination or buying their product or service feel welcome and respected. According to the (IGTLA), the gay model is inserted in the area of tourism to recognize a specific segment: gay tourism, which has a demand and particular needs, interested in traveling and performing leisure activities, which today represents a potential market of millions of dollars.

Table 1. LGBT travel, past 12 months, comparing results (2015/2016)

Leisure/Vacation/Holiday travel		Businness travel	
Trips taken (number)	%	Trips taken (number)	%
1	16	1	16
2	21	2	10
3	17	3	5
4	14	4	3
5–9	20	5–9	6
10+	4	10+	6
Number of flights for leisure		Hotel nights for leisure	
Round trip flights taken	%	Hotel nights purchased	%
1	15	1	4
2	16	2	7
3	10	3	6
4	8	4	6
5	6	5	5
6–9	10	6–9	16
10–14	4	10–14	15
15+	5	15+	27

Source: CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey USA Overview Report (2016).

The gay community is beginning to attract the attention of large companies, which identify their high purchasing power analyzed and recognized. Some destinations in the world are already an attractive destination for gay tourism. Outside Europe, the recommended countries for this market segment are Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Cuba and Argentina (IGTLA). LGBT travel is one of the fastest growing markets in the international travel industry. The importance of the segment is well known by the tourism industry, yet the understanding of its behavior as a tourist has not been widely discussed. It is important to understand the preferences of people who have this type of sexual orientation when traveling and visiting a destination [40]. [15], in its study,

questioned LGBT about the activities in which they participated in the destinations in the last 12 months. The results (Table 2) indicate that specific LGBT activities are more popular for Millennials than for Baby Boomers, especially going to LGBT neighborhoods and attending LGBT nightlife. The Pride LGBT event was especially popular for the Millennials, compared to Baby Boomers. Also note the importance of using dating websites and mobile apps to find other LGBT people, referred to by 29% of Millennials. Concerning the internet, it is also interesting to see different pages and gay ads, offering residence during the days of carnival [19]. The consolidation of gay culture has an influence on tourist destinations, leading them to transform their spaces in order to offer a range of services that meet the demand of gay tourists [3]. The gay and lesbian market, whether based on myths or not, and even if it is not representative of the purchasing power of all elements of the LGBT community, has gained prominence in

Table 2. Evaluation of the importance of websites for the LGBT community (% in agreement): Some destinations/tourism bureaus have "LGBT sections" on their websites. Do you agree or disagree with these statements?

	Gay & Bi Men	Lesbian & Bi Women	Millenials	Generation X	Baby Bomers
Having an LGBT website makes me feel that the tourism bureau is LGBT-friendly	91	92	91	92	92
A tourism website should do both, have LGBT imagery throughout the site and offer a specific LGBT page of information	89	91	90	88	91
Having an LGBT website makes me more likely to visit a destination	74	73	75	73	72
I am aware that tourism bureaus offer LGBT website pages	71	59	59	64	71
Including LGBT – inclusive imagery throughout a destination website is more important than having an LGBT-specific section	58	64	64	64	55
I have viewed a tourism bureau's LGBT page in the past 12 months	52	37	35	44	52
LGBT sections in tourism bureau websites are no longer needed	11	9	9	10	10

Source: CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey USA Overview Report (2016).

the media and is often seen as a segment of tycoon market and intrinsically willing to travel and to venture into new experiences. According to the study by [3], the push-pull factors referred to as the most important reasons for traveling were: opportunities to see the local culture, explore new places, opportunities for rest and relaxation, travel with friends and family, see dramatic or beautiful landscapes and enjoy quality gastronomic experiences. Regarding reservation methods, accommodation and choice of destination, sexuality may be a distinctive factor in the choice process [32, 33]. In their study, [33] also concluded that the search for security, living with people who share the same ideals, and escape from heterosis/homophobia are key elements in the choice of destination for gay tourists. Platforms and online dating applications also produce major changes in the way LGBTs make travel decisions [40]. In its study, [15] asked the LGBT community about the importance of having an LGBT microsite on destination websites.

The results (Table 2) point to the need to have more specific information for LGBT and LGBT microsites on BMD sites, and develop more specific marketing campaigns for this segment. In the choice of destination, the social and legal status of the destination are also important factors for the gay tourist - countries known for their homophobia, or where homosexuality is illegal or punishable by death, will then be targets avoided by the LGBT public, unless they are willing to suppress their sexuality [20, 32, 33]. The sites targeting this segment of tourism under study have greatly influenced the visibility of LGBT people and contributed to changes in social attitudes towards LGBT issues, which has allowed a greater connection between these people. Destinations, travel companies and brands that claim to reach the LGBT consumer will have to work constantly with this in mind. In the last few years, technology has brought about changes in the way consumers get inspired and book their travels.

In his study, [15] questioned the LGBT community about the method they had used to book their accommodation in the past 12 months and what their preferred method of

Table 3. Actual vs. preferred accommodation booking methods

Actual booking method (Multiple)	Past 12 months Actual booking methods used vs. preferred booking methods	Preferred booking method (Pick One)
63	Direct on hotel's website or app	43
46	Online travel agency booking website or app (e.g., Orbitz, Kayak, Hotels.com)	34
21	Telephone directly on hotel	7
17	Rental by-owner or shared economy website (e.g., Airbnb, Homeaway.com, VRBO.com)	6
10	A travel agent	3
8	Deals website (e.g., Groupon, Living Social)	2
5	Credit Card rewards website (e.g., Chase Ultimate Rewards, capital One No Hassle Rewards)	1

Source: CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey USA Overview Report (2016).

Table 4. Actual vs. preferred accommodation booking methods by age and gender

Actual booking method			Past 12 months Actual booking methods used vs. preferred booking methods	Preferred booking		
Millennials	Gen X	Boomers		Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
55	66	65	Direct on hotel's website or app	37	45	46
50	53	43	Online travel agency booking website or app (e.g., Orbitz, Kayak, Hotels.com)	42	38	29
23	18	16	Rental by-owner or shared economy website (e.g., Airbnb, Homeaway.com, VRBO.com)	10	6	6
16	18	26	Telephone directly on hotel	4	4	9
10	8	8	Deals website (e.g., Groupon, Living Social)	4	3	2
8	9	11	A travel agent	2	2	4
6	5	5	Credit Card rewards website	1	1	1

Source: CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey USA Overview Report (2016).

booking accommodation was. Concluded (Table 3) that this community prefers to book directly on the hotel's website instead of booking through online travel aggregator sites. While 17% of LGBT's booked their accommodation through a rental-by-owner booking website, only 6% booked through a shared economy website. It is also important to verify the differences in how to book accommodation by age and gender. According to [15] (Table 4), Millennials prefer to book through travel agent websites, while Baby Boomers prefer to book directly through hotel websites. The Rental-by-owner and Shared Economy booking sites are most popular among Millennials (Table 5).

According to [15, 39] Chasing the Pink Dollar research, it is increasingly possible to see the rise in LGBT consumers as well as the rise of companies with gay-friendly advertising and politics, and in turn LGBT consumers give preference to these companies. The first time this type of advertising was reported was in 1981 by Absolut Vodka, which launched two products aimed at homosexuals [19, 36]. Members of the

Table 5. Booking differences by gender

Gay/Bi Men	Booking differences by gender	Lesbians/Bi Women
65	Actually, booked direct on hotel's website or app	60
46	Prefer booking direct on hotel's website or app	40
15	Actually, booked via rental-by-owner or shared economy website (e.g., Airbnb)	21
4	Prefer booking via rental-by-owner or shared economy website (e.g., Airbnb)	9

Source: CMI's 21st Annual LGBT Tourism & Hospitality Survey USA Overview Report (2016).

LGBT community, despite all the criticisms made, considered this strategy completely innovative, and gave their full support to companies with similar policies [36].

3   Final Considerations

LGBTs are characterized as a community with a strong sense of identity, constantly sharing experiences and information and in constant virtual interaction [14, 15]. They use all the available means of communication, especially the communication channels and online platforms, developed specifically for this community, such as online associations and forums, specialized websites and apps, and various social networks. Those responsible for marketing, various tourism products and services, have been increasingly committed to reaching this segment of the market through the various channels of online communication. Nonetheless, international publications point to the need for even more products and websites designed and directed to this type of customers. Our research leads us to conclude that LGBT people connect to everything technological, digital and online, and use these tools both before (phase of the search of the places to visit and consequent decision making) during (phase of the trip itself to communicate with the rest of the community: photos of the sites and posts) and after their trips (evaluate and comment about the products and services consumed during their travels). Destination Management Organizations (DMO's) must provide citizens and tourists with a collaborative platform that allows bi-directional communication between the public administration and citizens or tourists/visitors. In order to value the tourist experience at the destination, free internet should be promoted in public and private places, associated with products that incorporate the use of technology and digital media in a context of diversified offer. Tourism marketing will have to establish a partnership between digital marketing and relational marketing, being more innovative and interactive, in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market, characterized by changes in the expectations of tourists vis-a-vis tourism destinations.

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