

New Media Technologies as drivers for arts based tourism

Current and future usage of new media technologies to promote art galleries of the Northern Territory, Australia

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KEY FINDINGS

- ➔ Problems caused by remoteness are of major concern to remote Indigenous communities and arts centres in the Northern Territory of Australia.
- ➔ Cultural tourism has been identified as main source of income and employment in rural communities. The increase of visitor numbers and sales of artworks in Aboriginal art centres will help to stabilise the economy and increase living-standards.
- ➔ In this context, Information and Communication Technologies were identified as “low cost promotional tools” that may help remote Aboriginal communities to advertise their products directly to a global market.
- ➔ Furthermore, Information and Communication Technologies provide support for marketing and management activities by facilitating better communication between tourism businesses and consumers and can be seen as tools to overcome remoteness and reliance on intermediaries, which will strengthen the arts centres position in the worldwide tourism market.
- ➔ As to date, to the best of our knowledge, nothing is known about the current usage of ICTs in art galleries in the Northern Territory, it is important to gather data in this field in order to identify where further research is needed.

RESEARCH AIM

To examine the current and future usage of Information and Communication Technologies in urban and remote art galleries in the Northern Territory to increase visitor numbers (both physical in the venues and on the websites) and sales of artworks.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cultural tourism as well as the sales of artworks has become an important source of income and employment in remote Aboriginal communities, (Belk & Groves, 1999, p. 20). Therefore, well-targeted and effective marketing activities are more important than ever to ensure growth and economic stability (Clarke, 2005, p. 89). So far, remote communities have some marketing strategies but there is still room for improvement. This is mainly due to the fact that they do not realise their opportunities, they are not well organised and do not have the sufficient marketing education (Mair et al., 2005, p. 169). The appreciation for Australian Aboriginal art increased significantly over the last years and therewith the potential for Aboriginal cultural tourism (Belk & Groves, 1999, p. 21).

At the moment, remote Australian Indigenous communities still fail to use possibilities provided by Information and Communication technologies (ICT) to promote their cultural tourism offers. Another aspect that may contribute to the present situation is that the management of Indigenous cultural tourism was, until now, primarily in the hands of the Non-Indigenous population in Australia. However today, Internet technologies and support from the government offer the opportunity to change this situation by granting remote Indigenous communities more control and voice in planning touristic activities. The implementation of ICTs has the potential to contribute to sustainable tourism development and economic growth in remote communities, but their true impact still needs to be assessed (Carson & Sharma, 2002, p. 78 - 80).

BACKGROUND

Problems caused by remoteness are of major concern to remote Indigenous communities and arts centres in the Northern Territory of Australia. This is visible if one relates the Territory's very small population of about 219,800 people (ABS, 2010a) to its huge size of 1,346,200 square kilometres (ABS, 2010b). Tourism is the second largest private sector activity (behind mining) in the Northern Territory (Brokensha & Guldberg, 1992, p. 197). Despite, or maybe because of the sparse population, the Northern Territory offers some of the most popular tourist attractions of Australia, namely Uluru, the Red Centre, Kakadu National Park and, of course, many Aboriginal communities which produce arts and crafts. These communities are mainly located in remote areas and because of this remoteness suffer from economic and health problems comparable with those of various less developed countries around the world (Brokensha & Guldberg, 1992, p. 197; Lea et al., 2008, p. 36).

Already in 1991, Finlayson recognised the importance of government to ensure the development and support for authentic Indigenous cultural attractions when funding Aboriginal tourism (Finlayson, 1991, p. 16). If Indigenous people are advertised as hunter-gatherers living in wild, tropical environments, difficulties would be created and one would lose sight of Aboriginal contributions to regional contact history. Finlayson sees tourism as an opportunity to change homogenous perceptions of remote Indigenous communities to a contemporary picture of their ways of living (*ibid.*, pp. 16-18) and stresses the importance of co-operations between remote cultural centres and the government. This view is likewise held by the Northern Territory Tourist Commission (NTTC) which, in its Northern Territory Indigenous Tourism Strategy (NTTC, 2003, p. 10), refers to tourism as a supporter of economic development in remote areas. Tourism, however, can only support economic development in remote areas if remote Indigenous communities participate in its development and decisions regarding this sector. Hence, especially the tourism industry and government need to understand and appreciate Aboriginal values and cultures (*ibid.*, p. 10). A further major barrier to start or commence remote tourism businesses is financing as quite commonly, Indigenous people do not have enough natural assets and capital to establish a business (*ibid.*, p. 15).

Starting and maintaining a business can be very difficult for people living in remote Aboriginal communities. The Internet was therefore identified as a "low cost promotional tool" which may help remote Aboriginal communities to advertise their products directly to a global market (*ibid.*, pp. 15-20).

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KEY LITERATURE

A significant body of research highlights the potential of tourism as a contributor to economic growth and welfare in rural regions of Australia (Altman, 2003; Carson & Sharma, 2002; Lea et al., 2008; Ryan & Huyton, 2000; Smith, 2003; Tourism NT, 2009b-d; Tremblay & Pitterle, 2008). However, many studies are rather focused on the demand side of tourism, especially tourists' motivations to participate in Indigenous cultural tourism activities in Australia (Foo & Rossetto, 1998; Ryan & Huyton, 2000; Tremblay & Pitterle, 2008). Furthermore, there are regular surveys conducted by 'Tourism Northern Territory' and 'Tourism Research Australia' evaluating tourist's motivations, their purpose of visiting Australia, activities, planning and booking behaviour as well as information sources for planning their holiday which provide information about potential target groups (Tourism NT, 2009a-c; Tourism Research Australia, 2008). An increase in visitor numbers and sales of artworks at Aboriginal art centres will help to stabilise the economy and increase living-standards in remote Indigenous communities. In this context, the rising importance of ICTs for the promotion of tourism in remote areas was recognised and pointed out in numerous publications (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005; Carson, D. & Sharma, P., 2002; Clarke, J., 2005; Evans, G. & Parravicini, P., 2005; Giaoutzi, M. & Nijkamp, P., 2006).

According to Buhalis and O'Connor (2005), Information and Communication Technologies provide support for tourism marketing and management by facilitating better communication between tourism businesses and consumers (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005, p. 15). Especially in Indigenous Australian communities, tourism helps to develop a sustainable economic foundation and over the last few years, the rising importance of the Internet and ICTs for promotional purposes is being recognised more generally and specifically in the context of Indigenous cultural tourism. Carson and Sharma (2002, p. 77) referred to ICTs as bridges to access the benefits of tourism. Remote Indigenous communities can use ICTs to promote their products to the national and global market or to communicate their values and beliefs to a worldwide audience. Although their opportunities are rising due to the introduction of wireless and mobile technology in remote communities, limited skills and access as well as costs still restrain remote Indigenous communities to effectively use ICTs for promoting their cultural tourism products (Carson & Sharma, 2002, p. 77). Clarke (2005, p. 96) also highlighted the importance of ICTs for rural tourism businesses. As these businesses are quite separated from the national and global market, ICTs can be seen as tools to overcome remoteness and reliance on intermediaries (Clarke, 2005, p. 96). Giaoutzi and Nijkamp (2006, p. 1) recognised that online technologies provide direct access to remote destinations and therewith alleviate the promotion and distribution of their products. Furthermore, ICTs provide information to tourism businesses in remote areas which can inspire them for new product developments and therewith strengthen their position in the tourism market (Giaoutzi & Nijkamp, 2006, p. 7).

Aboriginal artworks, which are regarded as Australia's national artistic symbols, constitute the core of the Northern Territory's art sector (Golvan, 1992). In his article, Golvan (1992) reported, that many people would think that remote Aboriginal communities tend to dissociate themselves from the white population, but in fact they are willing to share their cultural heritage with a global audience and therewith express their values and identity with their land and culture. According to his publication, Indigenous people see their artworks as instruments to create a bridge of recognition and respect between them and other peoples (ibid.).

In 1999 Belk and Groves (1999, p. 20) reported that Indigenous Australian art is gaining ever more success on the global art market where it is distributed either by the artists themselves, Indigenous corporations or often by 'white-run' art galleries and museums (Belk & Groves, 1999, p. 20). According to Simons (2000, p. 426) the demand for Australian Indigenous arts and crafts already goes beyond domestic and international tourism markets to direct promotion and sales overseas. This fact again highlights the potential for ICTs to directly promote and sell Indigenous artworks via the Internet. However, this can only be effective by using the most appropriate technology or application for the respective galleries.

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To evaluate the usage of technologies in art galleries and museums for promotional purposes, a number of studies have been conducted around the world (Baber, C., et al., 2001; Barry, A., 2006; Bruno, F., et al., 2009; Guttentag, D., 2009; Spasojevic, M. & Kindberg, T., 2001; Taylor, J., et al., 2003; Vom Lehn, D. & Heath, C., 2005). According to Schweibenz (1998, p. 189), the Internet is the ideal tool for promoting art galleries as it facilitates the combination of text, pictures, sound and video to establish an interactive presentation platform for exhibits on-line and so that even people in remote areas are provided with access to the art collections. Pursuant to Vom Lehn and Heath (2005, p.3) a rising interest of art gallery and museum managers in technologies to enhance their visitors' experience can be observed and in 2005, some gallery managers already began implementing technological devices, especially PDAs and touch-screen information terminals, in order to test their effectiveness in helping visitors to interpret artworks and to increase the museum's popularity (ibid. p.4). In this context, Vom Lehn and Heath explored the influences of PDAs and information kiosks on visitor experiences by conducting two case studies. The overall aim was to provide managers as well as engineers with practical information about the implementation and usage of technical devices (ibid., p. 1). It was found that the technological devices can indeed enrich visitor experiences by providing detailed, easily accessible information about the exhibits (ibid., p. 14). Nevertheless, it is crucial that the technologies are designed carefully to only display relevant and well targeted information without any technical interruptions.

Bartak (2007, p. 21) contributed to this topic that an art gallery's or museum's website is the core of its online marketing activities and it can be used to provide educational programs, launch promotional activities, generate revenue and at the same time communicate to and build relationships with audiences. When creating the website, it is critical to consider the varying degrees of people's experience with the Internet as well as the fast changing technologies. Bearing all that in mind, technologies can bring the collections to interested people without time and geographical constraints (ibid., p. 21) rather than trying to entice potential visitors to travel hundreds and thousands of kilometres to visit a collection. Reviewing art galleries and museums' technological activities, Bartak (2007, p. 22) recognised that their online presence increases and when combined with the latest technological innovations, interactive marketing and educational programs as well as solely digital museum projects evolve. Therewith a broader audience can be addressed and encouraged to re-visit the museum experience either physical or virtual (ibid., p. 22). However, Bartak's (2007, p. 22) findings show that a virtual art gallery changes the way people engage with artworks and although it represents a valuable alternative, it does not replace the physical venue (ibid., p. 22). Social Web (also called 'Web 2.0') applications like podcasts and blogs have been recognised as one of the most important innovations in art galleries and museums in 2007. These communication platforms facilitate a better interpretation of artworks and the interaction amongst visitors (ibid., p. 28). Besides that, technologies improve the access to art galleries and museums, alleviate customer relationship management and are useful for commercial art galleries to generate revenue (ibid., p. 33). According to Styliani et al. (2009, p. 520) in 2008, new media technologies like virtual and augmented realities gained popularity to be used for creating virtual exhibitions and distributing them on the Internet and on-site information kiosks (Styliani et al., 2009, p. 520).

Quesenberry and Sykes (2008, p. 121) studied this topic from a different angle, namely by focusing on commercial art galleries. Like managers of public art galleries and museums, managers of commercial art galleries are aware of the Internet's increasing importance and launch online marketing activities to reach a higher number of art collectors and artists. When establishing their online presence they always have to bear in mind that purchasing art differs from buying commodities as it involves much more social and intellectual components and therefore, the information need is much higher (Quesenberry & Sykes, 2008, p. 121). The findings of their study highlighted the potential of the Internet to increase the perception and knowledge about existing art galleries without replacing the physical visit to the venue (ibid., p. 121).

Summing up, the rising importance for public and commercial art galleries as well as museums to constantly monitor the progress on the technological market is apparent. Nowadays, it is essential for art galleries to be innovative and implement different technologies to augment the museum experience and distribute it to a worldwide audience. As many art gallery and museum managers already realise the benefits and the potential that is provided by new media technologies, numerous studies and

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projects are currently conducted around the world. To that, a highly accurate statement was made by Bartak (2007, p. 28) who states that “the sheer scope and diversity of on-line projects occurring at museums around the world is striking [and] user numbers are [similarly] impressive” (Bartak, 2007, p. 28). Although it has been recognised that most of the studies focus on the usage of technology within art galleries and museums to augment visitors’ experience, certainly their overarching aim is to increase visitor numbers or respectively sales of artworks which may be achieved by using these technologies. As to date, to the best of our knowledge, nothing is known about the current usage of ICTs for promotional purposes in art galleries in the Northern Territory, it is important to gather data in this field.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to examine the current and future usage of Information and Communication Technologies in urban and remote galleries in the Northern Territory to increase visitor numbers (both physical in the venues and on the websites) and sales of artworks. Therefore, the main research question is –

“Which Information and Communication Technologies are currently used and what is their potential for future usage to increase visitor numbers and stimulate sales of artworks in art galleries and museums in the Northern Territory of Australia?”

This main research question consists of and is supplemented by the following sub-questions:

- Which new media technologies are currently used to increase visitor numbers and sales of artworks in art galleries and museums and how?
- Which new media technologies are planned to be used to increase visitor numbers and sales of artworks in art galleries and museums and how?
- What are possible concerns of creative industry professionals and managers with regards to the implementation and usage of new media technologies?
- What is the attitude of art gallery and museum managers in the Northern Territory towards the efficiency of using new media technologies in order to influence people’s perception of creative areas, to stimulate arts-based tourism and increase visitor numbers to their online and physical spaces?
- Which specific technologies may be most attractive for the creative industries of the Northern Territory to be used in order to increase visitor numbers and sales of artwork?

The outcomes of this study will feed into the 'Virtual Galleries' project. The aim of this project is to reduce the negative effects of remoteness on prosperity, economic growth and the quality of life in remote communities by introducing three new media technologies in remote Aboriginal art galleries. Such technologies might include visitor-controlled internet cameras, live stream of point-of-view curator floor talks and 3D art galleries (the replication of existing galleries online, in a virtual environment like for example, Second Life).

Primarily, these technologies will be implemented in order to promote arts and crafts of remote communities to a worldwide audience and hence increase visitor numbers and stimulate sales of artworks in commercial art galleries. Furthermore, this project intends to investigate the influence of new media technologies on people’s perception of where creative areas exist in the Northern Territory.

METHOD

In this wider context, the aim of this project is to conduct case studies of three to four selected urban and remote art galleries and museums. These case studies include in-depth interviews with arts centre managers with regards to their current and planned usage of technology in order to attract

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visitors and increase revenue (commercial stakeholders only). In addition, the managers' general attitudes, future plans and expectations concerning the usage of new media technologies in the respective museums and art galleries will be explored. Further aspects that will be taken into account are potential concerns of art gallery/museum managers in regards to privacy and legal aspects, pre-requisites and required technical skills and education.

If possible, not only art centre managers will be interviewed, but also staff members will be questioned about their opinions concerning the usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the promotion of arts-based tourism. In order to test the degree to which the outcomes from the in-depth case studies can be generalised and to get an overview of the usage of technologies throughout the whole Northern Territory, an online-survey about this topic will be conducted with interested art galleries and museums which are located in the Northern Territory of Australia. A pilot-test of the interview questions will be conducted with managers at the Northern Territory library.

IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH

Participants in this present study will gain an insight into existing and emerging Information and Communication Technologies and will be offered to use such technologies to increase their visitor numbers and, if applicable, the sales of artworks. If the case studies can raise the participant's interest and they decide for participating in the overarching 'Virtual Galleries' project, they are able to receive financial support to install one or more of the involved technologies: visitor-controlled Internet cameras, live-stream of point-of-view curator floor talks and 3D art galleries with voice and text chat.

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