

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION APPROACH OF THE ADVENTURE TOURISM PROVIDERS FROM ROMANIA

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### ABSTRACT

Romania has a major anthropic, historical, natural and cultural capital that allows the practice of many forms of tourism such as religious tourism, rural tourism, city-break's, spa tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, etc.. This latter form of tourism has brought Romania in 2010 among the top 10 ranked countries around the world with adventure tourism potential based on principles of sustainable adventure tourism in both forms: soft and hard adventure tourism. Romania has a rich potential of adventure tourism, offering a wide range of tourist proposals of general interest, and the outdoor activities have been practiced with enthusiasm in Romania for a long time. As adventure tourism relies on innovation of entrepreneurs who are continually developing diverse set of products in frontier destinations, it is very important how these entrepreneurs communicate with their public. In our paper we analyze the communication approach of the adventure tourism providers from Romania, using content analysis of the web sites promoting this kind of tourism. Our analysis is based on ten pillars categorized into three factors: Safe and Welcoming, Adventure Resources, and Readiness; pillars used in the Adventure Tourism Development Index initiated by Adventure Travel Trade Association, The George Washington University and Vital Wave Consulting.

**Key Words:** hard adventure tourism, soft adventure tourism, Romanian adventure tourism providers, content analysis, websites analysis

### INTRODUCTION

The exceptional tourism potential of Romania has two main components:

- the natural component, represented by spectacular landscapes, varied configuration of landforms, favourable climatic conditions and lots of natural therapeutic spas;
- the historical component, represented by traces of succeeding civilizations that had lived on Romanian territory since ancient times, monuments or religious art objects, museums and museum collections, beautiful and original ethnographical and folklore elements and actual prestigious achievements.

Due to its geographical position and to the three natural elements defining its landscape structure and territory: the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea, Romania has the status of a Pontian-Danubian-Carpathian country. Romania holds a huge treasury of archaeological traces, historical, architecture and art monuments, as well as a valuable patrimony certifying the continuous labour and life evolution on these lands and the development of the Romanian culture and art (Romanian Tourism Statistical Abstract, 2010).

Adventure, as a way of travel, is increasingly appealing to travellers, allowing for a deeper cultural exchange with different people and an appreciation for the fragility of places, and is more often viewed as a “guilt-free” holiday option given that money spent can penetrate more deeply into communities, contributing to local economies. Romania has a rich potential of adventure tourism, offering a wide range of tourist proposals of general interest, and the outdoor activities have been practiced with enthusiasm in Romania for a long time. In fact, the word “tourism” means for many Romanians hiking, summer sports: climbing, cycling, mountain-biking, winter sports: skiing and water sports: kayaking and canoeing on the rivers and lakes, surfing, water

skiing and diving. Adventures proposed by some of the organizers can be considered forms of entertainment, challenge, self-exploration and they can help in identifying the limits and performance of each person involved in these kinds of activities. Some of these activities require technical knowledge, good training, others are addressed to all those who have little “fear” and a pint of “madness”.

And the tourists’ need of adrenaline became the “business idea” of entrepreneurs who promote their business mostly on web pages. As adventure tourism relies on innovation of entrepreneurs who are continually developing diverse set of products in frontier destinations, it is very important how these entrepreneurs communicate with their public.

In our paper we analyze the communication approach of the adventure tourism providers from Romania on the internet based on ten pillars categorized into three factors; pillars used in the Adventure Tourism Development Index.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Adventure Tourism Development Index (ATDI) is a joint initiative of The George Washington University (GW), The Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) and Vital Wave Consulting. The ATDI offers a ranking of countries around the world based on principles of sustainable adventure tourism and is calculated through a combination of expert survey data and quantitative data gathered from international indices. Countries recognized by the United Nations are benchmarked in the ATDI and are represented in two groups: Developed Countries and Developing/Emerging Economies. ATDI 2010 includes 28 Developed countries and 165 Developing/ Emerging countries. In 2010, the ATDI had a panel of 316 experts. Experts are people with more than five years of experience in the adventure travel industry. They are able to comment on any countries that they have visited in the past five years. The ten pillars are categorized into three factors: Safe and Welcoming, Adventure Resources, and Readiness. The calculation method used in the ATDI has been adjusted to weigh more heavily those pillars with specific importance to adventure travel market competitiveness: Entrepreneurship and Adventure Activity Resources ([http://www.adventureindex.travel/docs/atdi\\_2010\\_report.pdf](http://www.adventureindex.travel/docs/atdi_2010_report.pdf)).

**Safe and Welcoming Factor - 1. Sustainable Development Policy** - To assign a quantitative value to government policies supportive of sustainable tourism, the team used the following two indicators: 1. The Environmental Performance Index; 2. Unemployment per country (as a % of total labour force). **2. Safety and Security** - The Safety Pillar is made up of two indicators and an expert opinion question: 1. The Corruption Perceptions Index; 2. Foreign and Commonwealth Travel Warnings; 3. Expert Opinions. Countries with high levels of transparency and low or no travel warnings issued are safer for travellers. Lower levels of corruption are also a sign of a more secure country. **3. Health** - Countries where healthcare is readily available are better able to support adventure travellers. The Health Pillar is made up of two indicators from the World Health Organization: 1. Hospital beds (per 1000 people); 2. Physicians (per 1000 people). **4. Natural Resources** - The Natural Resources Pillar is made up of four indicators and an expert opinion question: From the World Resources Institute: 1. Urban Concentration; 2. Population Density; From CIA World Factbook: 1. Kilometres of coastline; 2. Ratio of coast to total area. Places with more unpopulated open space are likely to have greater natural resources for adventure tourism.

**Adventure Resources Factor - 5. Adventure Activity Resources (cycling, climbing, hiking, rafting)** - In this category the ATDI recognizes a destination’s competitiveness relative to its ability to support adventure sports, which span a range of outdoor, nature-based activities - from bird watching to mountaineering; whitewater rafting to rock climbing; caving to paragliding. The Adventure Activities Resources Pillar is made up of two indicators: 1. Protected Species; 2. Forests, Grasslands, Drylands. A high number of endangered species and the presence and growth of forests, grasslands and drylands indicate resources for adventure activities. **6. Entrepreneurship** - The Entrepreneurship Pillar is made up of one component containing ten different factors: 1. 2010 Index of Economic Freedom. This indicator assesses 10 economic freedoms: Business Freedom, Trade Freedom, Fiscal Freedom, Government size, Monetary Freedom, Investment Freedom, Financial Freedom, Property Rights, Freedom from Corruption, and Labour Freedom - which combined indicate the level of the barriers to entry for new entrepreneurs.

**Readiness Factor - 7. Humanitarian** - The Humanitarian Pillar is concerned with human development in a country and its link to the desire for adventure travellers to enjoy authentic, unscripted experiences. The Humanitarian Pillar is made up of three indicators: 1. Happy Planet Index (HPI); 2. NGO Density; 3. NGO Presence. **8. Cultural Resources** - Adventure travellers are as keen to learn about new

cultures as they are to explore nature. The Cultural Resources Pillar is made up of two indicators and an expert opinion question: 1. UNESCO World Heritage Sites; 2. Protected Area as a % of Total Land. A high number of World Heritage sites and a high number of protected areas indicate a high number of cultural resources. **9. Tourism Infrastructure** - Tourism infrastructure includes: 1. Hard infrastructure, such as roads, airports, lodging facilities, and trails; 2. Soft infrastructure, such as: Trail maps, Accessible information on heritage and culture, Ground operators and outfitters, Training programs for adventure tourism providers such as guides, interpreters, and ecologies. **10. Image** - A country's image for sustainability and adventure opportunity will attract travellers who value these aspects. Through their visitation and expenditures, these people will support the country's ongoing sustainable development strategies. The ATDI examines a destination's adventure travel image. ([http://www.adventureindex.travel/docs/atdi\\_2010\\_report.pdf](http://www.adventureindex.travel/docs/atdi_2010_report.pdf)).

## ROMANIA AND ADVENTURE TOURISM

Romania is included in the ATDI developing countries category, where it is analyzed together with over 160 other global destinations. Considering the rankings for 2010, Romania moved up two positions ranking 9<sup>th</sup>, thus entering the top 10, while in 2009 ranked the 11<sup>th</sup>, and in 2008 the 21<sup>st</sup>. The index conducted by American University takes into account not only the current popularity of the destinations, although in some cases it coincides with the score, as the potential development and characteristics of this tourism segment, based on outdoor activities or exploration of different cultures. In 2010, the first three places in the category of developing countries were occupied by Israel, Slovakia and Chile. Estonia and the Czech Republic completed the top five. In the category of developed countries, Switzerland, Iceland and New Zealand have held the top three places.

World Tourism Organization officials (<http://unwto.org>) said that Romania could double the number of foreign tourists in the next 2-3 years, from 1.3 million now, if they continue to focus on promoting the mountain, the Delta, the monasteries and country life. Romania this year moved up three positions (ranking 63<sup>rd</sup>) in the travel & tourism competitiveness index developed by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which includes 139 countries, but is last in the European Union. The ranking is led by Switzerland, Germany and France, followed by Austria, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Spain and Singapore.

Romania ranks high in cultural resources, tourism infrastructure, ICT infrastructure and environmental sustainability, but low in ground transport infrastructure and affinity to travel & tourism, (the tourism openness ranks the lowest – 123 out of 139 – being taken into account the tourism expenditure and receipts as a percentage of GDP / 2009), as well as prioritization of travel and tourism, effectiveness of marketing and branding and government prioritization of the T&T industry ranking the lowest. As concerning the Environmental Performance Index, 2010, Romania ranks 45<sup>th</sup> out of 163 economies.

Table 1

The ATDI 10 pillars for Romania in 2009 and 2010

Romania	2010	2009
Sustainable Development	7.22	7.78
Safety	5.37	6.33
Health	1.58	3.96
Natural Resources	4.69	6.34
<b>Safe &amp; Welcoming factor</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>
Adventure Activity Resources	9.90	7.29
Entrepreneurship	7.18	7.32
<b>Adventure factor</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>
Humanitarian	2.30	3.83
Cultural Resources	5.60	5.69
Infrastructure	7.58	8.29
Image	9.52	8.86
<b>Readiness factor</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>
ADTI score	82	88
Rank	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>

Based on Table 1 we can notice that Romania scores high in adventure activity resources and image but rather poorly in health and humanitarian pillar meaning that there are less number of beds and physicians per

1,000 people and opportunities to volunteer than in other countries. We can mention also the fact that against 2009, natural resources and infrastructure score lower which could denote that the natural resources are not well-managed and rather exploited and the infrastructure is considered less “appropriate for adventure travel”.

The promotion of either hard or soft adventure tourism virtually does not exist both at national or the travel agencies level. The only persons getting money out of soft adventure tourism are a few local guides who were able to scratch some routes and “pick” tourists from the guest houses in the area approaching them directly and offering them routes known only by them, meals based on game, rafting, wandering through wildlife areas as beautiful and picturesque. Hard adventure, soft adventure and other travellers place a high importance on similar things when planning their vacations and most of them did that by conducting research online, according to a survey developed by Xola Consulting (<http://www.xolaconsulting.com/Adventure-Market-2010.pdf>).

As Romania scores high on *Broadband Internet subscribers* (41 out of 139) and medium on *Internet users* and *Extend of business Internet users* (64 out of 139) according to WEF, Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index and because there is less effectiveness of marketing and branding of adventure tourism at national level we conducted a research on the communication approach of the adventure tourism providers on the internet, using content analysis.

### METHODOLOGY

Researchers regard content analysis as a flexible method for analyzing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). Content analysis describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren, 1981). The specific type of content analysis approach chosen by a researcher varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied (Weber, 1990). Although this flexibility has made content analysis useful for a variety of researchers, the lack of a firm definition and procedures has potentially limited the application of content analysis (Tesch, 1990). The differentiation of content analysis is usually limited to classifying it as primarily a qualitative versus quantitative research method. Content analysis can be used as a quantitative research method, with text data coded into explicit categories and then described using statistics. This approach is sometimes referred to as quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Morgan, 1993).

Typically, a content analysis starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content. This quantification is an attempt not to infer meaning but, rather, to explore usage (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Analyzing for the appearance of a particular word or content in textual material is referred to as manifest content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). If the analysis stopped at this point, the analysis would be quantitative, focusing on counting the frequency of specific words or content (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002).

In our research we used quantitative content analysis starting from identifying the research question: *How many results do we get by searching for the following words on the internet: turism de aventura (adventure tourism), rafting in Romania, hiking in Romania, climbing in Romania and cycling in Romania?* In doing that we used as search engine - [www.google.ro](http://www.google.ro) - as having the biggest market share in 2011 (<http://marketshare.hitslink.com/search-engine-market-share.aspx?qprid=4>) and it is designed mostly for web-sites written in Romanian. We have chosen as categories of analysis the words mentioned above (which are mentioned by ATDI as adventure activities) and we were interested in quantifying the results on [www.google.ro](http://www.google.ro). Then we proceed to analyzing the web sites and quantifying the web sites that have the most adventure activities mentioned by ATDI.

Because we used the internet as the main way of branding and marketing adventure tourism and as our principal field of research, we conducted nonparametric analysis to test if there are correlations between the first 30 ATDI developing countries and data on *Fixed Broadband Subscriptions, total* (June 2011) according to OECD and those provided by EUROSTAT on the share of *Enterprises with fixed broadband access for 2010*.

### STUDY FINDINGS

Adventure travellers place a higher importance on exploring new places, time to be in nature, meeting and engaging with local cultures and pushing their physical limits. Based on a survey published by Xola Consulting (<http://www.xolaconsulting.com/Adventure-Market-2010.pdf>) most adventure travellers are turning

to the Internet to research their trips. When researching a destination, most travellers go directly to Google with generic search terms such as the destination name. Over 30% visited the destination's official website; this may be because it appeared high in the search results. Around 20% used social media to learn about the destination either by reading a blog post or viewing a friend's photos on a social network. So the Internet is an important media to promote adventure tourism either locally or internationally.

Based on the values recorded for the first 30 ATDI developing countries and data on *Fixed Broadband Subscriptions, total* (June 2011) according to OECD ([http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_34225\\_38690102\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/54/0,3746,en_2649_34225_38690102_1_1_1_1,00.html)) and those provided by EUROSTAT on the share of *Enterprises with fixed broadband access for 2010*, we considered whether the data provided are statistically correlated.

The results proved that between *ATDI 2010* and *Fixed broadband subscriptions, total* there is a direct and strong correlation, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.799 (Table 2) and is statistically significant for the whole population examined, respectively the first 30 countries from the 2010 top-chart conducted by George Washington University. Kendall's correlation coefficient is 0.564 and Spearman's rho coefficient is 0.745, so they are also statistically significant.

**Table 2**  
**Pearson Correlations**

		ATDI score 2010	Fixed broadband subscriptions, total, June 2011
ATDI score 2010	Pearson Correlation	1,000	,799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,	,003
	N	30	11
Fixed broadband subscriptions, total, June 2011	Pearson Correlation	,799	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,003	,
	N	11	11

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analyzing the correlation between ATDI for 2010 and EUROSTAT indicator (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tin00090>) *Enterprises with fixed broadband access for 2010* we noticed that there is an inverse correlation of very low intensity (Pearson correlation = -0.167) and statistically insignificant for the analyzed population (only 40% of the population).

In order to answer the research question, we analyzed the internet using [www.google.ro](http://www.google.ro) as search engine. For the first category of analysis – “turism de aventura” (adventure tourism) we got about 868,000 results, for the second category - “Rafting in Romania” about 8.440 results, for the third category - “Hiking in Romania” about 38,100 results, for the fourth category - “Climbing in Romania” about 57,500 results and for the fifth category - “Cycling in Romania” about 12,800 results. On the websites of adventure tourism providers found on the internet there were many other outdoor activities and sports such as: trekking, caving, flying fox, mountain-biking, off-road, kayaking, ATV, bungee jumping, canoeing, balloon ascent, paragliding, paintball, snowboard, surviving programs, horseback ridings and others. The main adventure tourism providers from Romania and the activities provided are described in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Main providers of adventure tourism from Romania (websites results)**

Main providers of adventure tourism	Website domain name	Language of the website	Activities provided
Adventures 4U Cluj Napoca, Cluj	<a href="http://www.adventures4u.ro">www.adventures4u.ro</a> <a href="http://www.outdoor4u.ro">www.outdoor4u.ro</a>	Romanian and English	Climbing, trekking, rafting, canyoning, caving, flying fox, mountain-biking, off-road, kayaking
Total Fun Campina, Prahova	<a href="http://www.totalfun.ro">www.totalfun.ro</a>	Romanian	Paintball, climbing, ATV, canoeing, kayaking, balloon ascent
Outdoor Expert București	<a href="http://www.outdoorexper.ro">www.outdoorexper.ro</a>	Romanian	Adventure race, via ferrata, climbing, mountain-biking, flying fox
Protrekking	<a href="http://www.outdoorexperience.ro">www.outdoorexperience.ro</a>	Romanian,	Rafting , canoe and kayak trips

Tîrgu-Mureş, Mureş		English, and Hungarian	
Romanian Adventure Center Bucureşti	<a href="http://www.romanianadventure.ro">www.romanianadventure.ro</a>	Romanian, English, Polish	Rafting, off-road, climbing, mountain-biking, canyoning, ATV, archery, paintball and fishing.
Extreme Zone Adventure Vadul Crisului, Bihor	<a href="http://www.extreme-zoneadventure.ro">www.extreme-zoneadventure.ro</a>	Romanian, English, Polish and Hungarian	Rafting, off-road, ATV, rock climbing, mountain-biking, canyoning, trekking, archery, air-boarding, kayaking, paragliding
EcoXtrem Teambuilding Bucureşti	<a href="http://www.ecoxtrem-teambuilding.ro">www.ecoxtrem-teambuilding.ro</a>	Romanian and English	Travel, Trekking and Events
Paintball Team Braşov	<a href="http://www.paintballteam.ro">www.paintballteam.ro</a>	Romanian	rafting, off-road, ATV, rock climbing, mountain-biking, trekking, archery, air-boarding, kayaking, paragliding, paintball, snowboard, surviving programs, flying fox
Vision Consulting Bucureşti	<a href="http://www.programe-teambuilding.ro">www.programe-teambuilding.ro</a>	Romanian	Teambuilding programs including rafting, rock climbing, treasure hunting with snowmobiles or bikes, ice climbing
Romania Gorj Aventura Târgu-Jiu, Gorj	<a href="http://www.turismaventura.ro">www.turismaventura.ro</a>	Romanian	Rafting, canyoning, caving, flying fox
Vertical Adventure Timișoara, Timiș	<a href="http://www.verticaladventure.ro">www.verticaladventure.ro</a>	Romanian and English	Rafting, rock climbing, rappel, canyoning, paintball, cave exploration, surviving programs
Teamadventure Romania, Braşov	<a href="http://www.teamadventure.ro">www.teamadventure.ro</a> <a href="http://www.teambuilding.ro">www.teambuilding.ro</a>	Romanian	via ferrata, climbing, mountain-biking, rafting, off-road, ATV, rock climbing, trekking, archery, air-boarding, kayaking, paragliding, kite-boarding
Jump Adventure - extreme sports	<a href="http://bungee-jumping.ro">http://bungee-jumping.ro</a>	Romanian	via ferrata, mountain-biking, Rafting, off-road, ATV, rock climbing, trekking, bungee jumping

Based on the results we noticed that adventure tourism in Romania is rather hard than soft, being more focused on activities that are thrilling but require training, physical strength and courage and is less oriented towards interaction with local cultures or visiting historical sites. Even the “Romanian Adventure Fest”, which first took place in 2011 (<http://www.adventurefest.ro>) is focused more on hard activities: river rafting, diving, sailing, off-road, flying fox, canoeing, and climbing. The main goal of the festival is to promote this kind of tourism among local population convincing them that such activities do not require special physical skills or experience but only a pint of courage. It is intended also to attract the attention of local authorities about the great tourist potential of these activities, hoping for a more efficient branding and marketing of adventure tourism and providing financial support.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the literature analysis and the survey conducted we can conclude that Romania will have to learn how to sell its wild treasures, and also to encourage investors through tax incentives to build close to these remote areas, to preserve and include them in tour packages. It is also very important how these remote areas can be maintained, namely, how the authorities can intervene so that the wild and unspoiled treasures are not turned into chaotic development with more tourist accommodation units than it is necessary.

Since the adventure travellers represent a significant, growing market, tour operators and tourism providers should consider that there are new forms of travellers such as eco-travellers who seek connection with authenticity of people and nature, adventure traveller looking for connection with nature via thrilling activities and eco-adventurers who seek authentic, thrilling or awakening activities. They are always searching for new destinations and value online reviews or comments and the opinions of friends and family. Destinations and operators should invest in understanding keywords and optimizing their sites for searches in the key engines. Ensuring that a website is findable in all languages that travellers may be searching in is an important consideration. Based on our results the adventure tourism providers scores poorly on this last aspect, the

majority of the websites analyzed were only in Romanian even though they offered a wide range of attractive and challenging activities.

The adventure tourists are not always the biggest spenders but because they seek local lodging, guides, crafts, food, more money stays in the destination. They require less infrastructure – adventure tourists don't want something paved, overbuilt, that is why Romania could benefit from this kind of tourism as it scores low on infrastructure according to ATDI and ground infrastructure based on the WEF-TTC Report. The development of the adventure tourism could be a competitive advantage for Romania as we have the potential the only thing we need is to learn how to promote and sell it to local population and international tourists as well as place a bigger importance on soft tourism such as cultural exchanges, visiting historical sites or volunteer tourism.

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