

The digital future and its possible influence on winter tourism in the European Alps

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Introduction and methodological approach

In the developed countries digitalization plays already a significant role in everybody's life and influences both the private and the professional life significantly. Based on an extensive literature review and expert discussion the presentation will analyze the expected benefits by digitalization and discuss possible consequences from an outdoor recreation and tourism perspective, including economic and ecological aspects. In order to get insights managers of 9 ski resorts in Austria and Switzerland were interviewed at a fair in Grenoble and at a conference for cable car enterprises in Zell am See Austria. In addition firms offering data collection systems were interviewed about their typical products and the data they provide.

Main findings

The expectations concerning the possible effects by digitalization mentioned by experts and tourism stakeholders embrace a wide range of possible effects, including

- a better communication with the client,
- an improved marketing/marketing strategy,
- a tool for influencing the booking behavior,
- an individualization of the offer with tailor-made product development,
- an opportunity for new experiences such as the “ski movie” (video) or the “speed check” with finish photo), as well as
- an economic benefit due to an increasing automatization of the internal processes,
- a tool to optimize the cable car maintenance and slope management
- a significant support for controlling and monitoring especially concerning energy efficiency and the check for wear.

In addition the overall discussion about pricing systems must be seen in the context of a significant shift towards a digital future (see figure 1, showing an online platform with daily changing prices). It is expected that in the digital future the cable car enterprise will be able to answer the question “Who is my client” in detail, based on his or her booking behavior. However, whether this additional knowledge will change the whole business model remains unclear (Schegg and Engeler 2018).

Ski areas with an environmental management system, based on EMAS or ISO 14001, had to invest in the data collection concerning all environmental issues and resources. The available digital data had a significant effect on the management in winter (e.g. artificial snow production and its spatial distribution) as well as in summer (e.g. mowing concept considering biodiversity hot pots) and open the door for energy saving and environmental protection. Some experts also perceive opportunities for the development of new tourism products and experiences using these digital data.

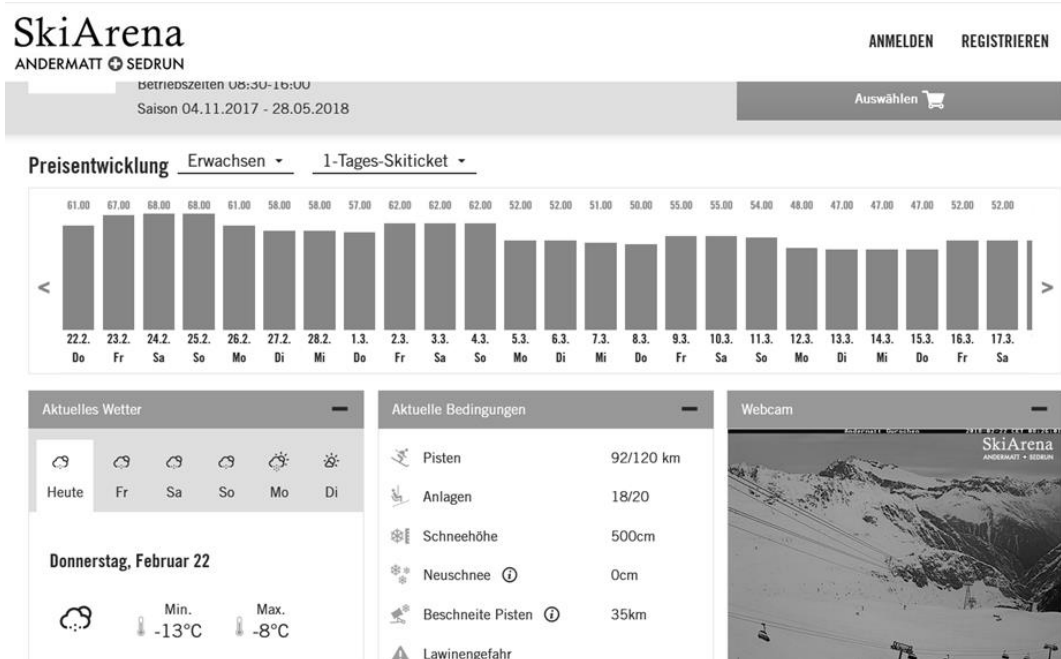


Figure 1 Online booking website and the given information with daily changing prices (SkiArena Andermatt – Sedrun and Ticketcorner 2018, screen shot 22.2.2018).

Conclusion

Within the alpine destinations in Europe the differences in the implementation and visioning about digitalization differ already significantly. While in Switzerland all these opportunities mentioned above are taken into consideration, Austrian entrepreneurs focus more on marketing and communication opportunities.

Many experts underline that the tasks of a cable car enterprise in winter tourism have changed from transportation to an experience providing integrated local tourism enterprise and may change again to a digital integrated provider offering individualized products (Schegg and Engeler 2018).

Overall the tourism branch is not fully aware of the great opportunities for future development. Beside the improved marketing and communication tools with the outdoor recreationists or the tourist, the digital future can be used for developing personalized products, including active experiences but also environmental education. In addition it may lead to improved environmental management, saving money, energy and protecting natural resources. The digital future may also affect the client's behavior and may be used for co-creating new products and providing new experiences. However in this respect further research is needed.

References

Schegg, R. Engeler, M. (2018) Bergbahnen Geschäftsmodelle, Kooperationen und Digitalisierung. Available at: <https://www.pwc.ch/de/publications/2018/PwC%20Studie-Bergbahnen-Hoch%20hinaus-DE.pdf> (accessed 07 March 2018).