Article

Online Marketing of European Geoparks as a Landscape Promotion Tool

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Abstract: In the current post-COVID-19 era, online marketing is a supporting tool in marketing. The potential visitors to tourism destinations, such as geoparks, are increasingly guided and oriented by the rules of online marketing as the online space represents the main source of information. Geoparks should take this as a key fact. The research concentrates on the issue of geopark marketing from the view of the available information that geoparks present in the online space. The fundamental is to point out the information that is available on geopark websites. The method used in the research is based on an evaluation matrix that served as a basis for searching for information on websites. Based on the results of the analysis, geoparks in the EGN network present information of a general nature to a sufficient extent on their websites; they lack a better offer of product packages, online sales and orientation to new social networks that are used by the young generation. The clear answer is the professionalization of marketing, which would undoubtedly represent an effective step in the management of geoparks as well as the promotion of the country that the geopark represents.

Keywords: geopark; marketing; survey; European geoparks network; marketing strategy; 4P

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing global industries. It has been recognized as an important tool for economic development that generates income and employment for developing countries [1]. However, tourism is very vulnerable to natural or man-made disasters [2]. In the current pandemic era, the tourism industry is one of the industries most affected by social restrictions [3]. For this reason, the existence of geoparks as part of their sustainable development strategy is a very effective way to combine tourism, landscape protection, education and economic development in one place. This multiplier effect can only be achieved under the assumption of effective management in all areas of the operation of geoparks. The current era faces great pressure from competition in many sectors, and globalization forces organizations to constantly change and adapt to the environment [4–6]. Marketing, as such, is currently becoming an inseparable part of management in any industry. It represents a wide range of areas and activities; is a communication hub between supply and demand; speaks about the image of the organization, means of promotion, presentation and communication; and affects the overall position of the organization in the environment in which it is located [7]. For tourism, marketing plays a key role in attracting visitors since nowadays, most potential visitors first plan a trip, experience, tour or other activity, or at least try to obtain basic information about the object of their interest in the online space. It is the simplest and most effective way of obtaining information brought to us by modern times and rapid progress in the field of information technology [8]. Of course, the pandemic situation forced ordinary visitors to work more within online spaces as an inexhaustible source of information [9]. Online spaces, social networks, online communication platforms, websites and other resources have brought the

functioning of organizations to a level where marketing strategy represents one of the key positions in management and organization [10–13].

As mentioned by Goeldner and Ritchie [1], tourism in today's world represents a rapidly developing area, which creates demand for a diverse offer of recreational, educational, sports and other activities of a similar nature, as well as activities associated with a secondary offer ensuring and supporting these activities. According to the World Tourism Organization [14], sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable for all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Geotourism represents a combination of the need for nature protection, the values of geological heritage and conservation, while making these geological values available to the public, educating and satisfying the demand for tourist and visitor experiences [15]. This form of tourism responds very directly to the need for nature protection and presents nature in a sustainable way. Geoparks represent a modern geotourism product that meets all these attributes. Here, the need to create an effective organizational unit that, in the cooperation of all its components, would create prerequisites for fulfilling the goals for which geoparks are created in the world arises [16]. With the need for nature protection and the implementation of the principles of sustainability, the demands for the management and organization of this area and related services are constantly increasing. Furthermore, the demand for an effective and interesting presentation of the natural heritage, arousing interest in continuous education in this area, raising awareness of the need to protect natural heritage and, finally, attracting and retaining potential visitors in an effective manner are growing in direct proportion. Management of these activities and the creation of an organizational unit with resulting purposeful functions and tasks is a key factor in the successful functioning and management of geoparks. The effectiveness of the control unit depends on the setting of the sub-components and their interplay and cooperation [17].

Geoparks represent a young and modern geotourism product that opens new possibilities and ways of presenting geological heritage. This product is characterized by many attractions with a huge potential in the field of development, education, protection of the natural environment and increasing the awareness of society about natural values. One of the main goals of the existence of geoparks is education. Geoparks offer a modern way of presenting the geological heritage, giving up the classical methods of education, which has the effect of arousing the interest of young people [18]. The education in this connection is understood not only in a narrower sense (in schools), but also in a broader one (stimulating interest in nature conservation with new knowledge, increasing society's interest in these areas, etc.). The concept of geoparks emphasizes active marketing and new forms of promotion, which would largely appeal to the young generation.

There are several characteristics or definitions of geoparks from different authors [19–25]. In general, geoparks are territories with a geological heritage and a priority accent placed on the strategy of sustainable development [26]. Most geoparks operate in cooperation with public authorities, together with local communities, but also with private interest groups. It must have clearly defined boundaries and a sufficient area for real territorial economic development. A geopark must include a certain number of geological sites that are extremely important in terms of their scientific quality, rarity, aesthetic appeal or educational value [27].

Zouros [28] described a geopark as a broad range of activities that combines the main components of the operation of each geopark, which include scientific research, creation of inventory and maps of geological sites, protection of geological heritage, operation of thematic museums and interpretation centers, interpretation and promotion of geological sites, conservation of fossils, creation parks for visitors, establishment of a network of hiking trails connecting geological sites with ecotourism infrastructure, development of

environmental education programs at geological sites, organization of scientific and cultural events and promotion of monumental geological sites. Geoparks are also presented as ideal destinations for education [20–22,24]. These authors described geoparks from more specific point of view of activities and content, but the UNESCO [22] definition points to the diversity of the geopark areas presented and says that a geopark represents an area containing one or more places of scientific importance from a geological aspect, but also from the archaeological, economic or cultural (particularity European) importance. According to this definition, a geopark is an area with a significant geological heritage, with a coherent and strong management structure and where a strategy of sustainable economic development is in place [22]. Geoparks represent a geotourism product that systematically creates functional values for society, and one of its basic tasks is to address society, educate it and raise people's awareness of the natural values of the country, the geodiversity around us, the protection of nature and its responsible use in order to preserve these values to future generations [29]. The existence of geoparks is conditioned by their functional value in society, where one of the basic functions in the field of education at various stages of the educational process is raising society's awareness in relation to nature and the values it provides. In connection with this, it is necessary to emphasize the other side of natural heritage, which does not only serve us, but within the function of the geopark it is necessary to raise this awareness of the society in the spirit of the need to protect the natural heritage and thus ensure its value to future generations [30]. The definitions refer to a geopark as an area that is characterized by scientific importance, not only from the geological aspect, but also from archaeological, economic or cultural value of national aspects of European or worldwide importance [22]. The geopark must include a certain number of phenomena with uniform importance due to their scientific value, rarity, artistic and educational value, which may be part of archaeological, ecological, historical or cultural potential [31]. Within a geopark as a territory or a destination, the methods and practices to choose must be met in order to address visitors and offer a geotourism product in a modern way. The wide range of possibilities and the strong pressure of today's competition requires an effective choice of marketing strategy for reaching and retaining visitors. It is necessary to emphasize the phrase "in a modern way" to offer a geotourism product to certain target groups because the development and trends in marketing communication in addressing the potential visitors and thus arousing interest, represent a very rapidly changing range of increasingly modern marketing tools and means of promotion [32]. For this reason, it is also necessary to respond in this area and follow trends.

Discussions of the need for a new initiative for Earth heritage protection and conservation by collaboration between European territories arose in 1996. The idea emerged during the 30th International Geological Congress held in Beijing, at the Symposium on the protection of Geological Heritage. It was agreed that the scientific community alone does not have sufficient power and recourses to achieve the sustainable management of geological heritage without the strong involvement and participation of local communities. Representatives of four European territories from different European Countries—the Reserve Geologique de Haute-Provence—France, the Petrified Forest of Lesvos—Greece, the Geopark Gerolstein/Vulkaneifel—Germany, and the Maestrazgo Cultural Park-Spain—all representing a particular geological and geomorphological heritage, have started transnational cooperation in the idea of sustainable local development based on geoconservation and promotion of Earth heritage, with the support of the E.U. initiative LEADER II. The four partners are rural areas with important geosites, natural beauty and high cultural potential but are poorly protected and evaluated. They also have similar socioeconomic characteristics and all of them face problems of slow economic development, unemployment and a high level of emigration. Facing similar problems as the managing authorities of the geological reserves, natural parks and museums in these four areas decided to strengthen their collaboration to achieve better results. This collaboration included studies, meetings, field visits and sharing of information, expertise, methodologies and certain operation tools in the fields of geoconservation, landscape management, organization of

geotouristic and educational activities and Earth heritage promotion. The analysis of characteristics, perspectives and problems of each territory led to the definition of a common development strategy focused on geotourism. A massive amount of work carried out during the following years led to the definition of the "European Geopark" concept and the establishment of the European Geoparks Network (EGN) in June 2000. For the first time, this new concept linked the scientific efforts in the protection and conservation of geosites with the development priorities and needs of the local communities living in the protected territory. The idea behind this initiative is that true sustainable territorial development can be achieved through the protection and promotion of Earth's heritage, which can be valorized for scientific, educational and touristic activities. Furthermore, the sustainable development of territory was considered a presupposition for the success of a conservation strategy. The main guidelines used in this effort were in good agreement with those created by UNESCO's Division of Earth Sciences for creation of the UNESCO geoparks, an initiative that started in 1997 but failed to become UNESCO's Geoparks Program [33].

The European Geoparks Network (EGN) has been established through a convention signed on Lesvos Island, Greece aimed at the protection and enhancement of the European Earth heritage and promotion a sustainable local development through geotourism. From the very beginning, the four founding members recognized that such an initiative must be open to all European territories sharing the same ideas, must be organized in a democratic structure and must have transparent guidelines and procedures for all new partners. The EGN declaration established the main characteristics and criteria for the designation of a territory as a "European Geopark" [20]. The main objectives of the EGN are the multi- and bi-lateral cooperation on the protection and conservation of Earth heritage, the development of geo-touristic and geo-educational activities and the promotion of sustainable local development in the participating territories. The EGN has been growing rapidly since its formation. Its growth confirms the utility of a European network of collaboration in which expertise and tools linking geoconservation and sustainable development through geotourism can be shared and implemented in a structured and responsible manner for the benefit of local communities [33]. At present, the Network presented in Figure 1 comprises 94 Geoparks from 28 European Countries.
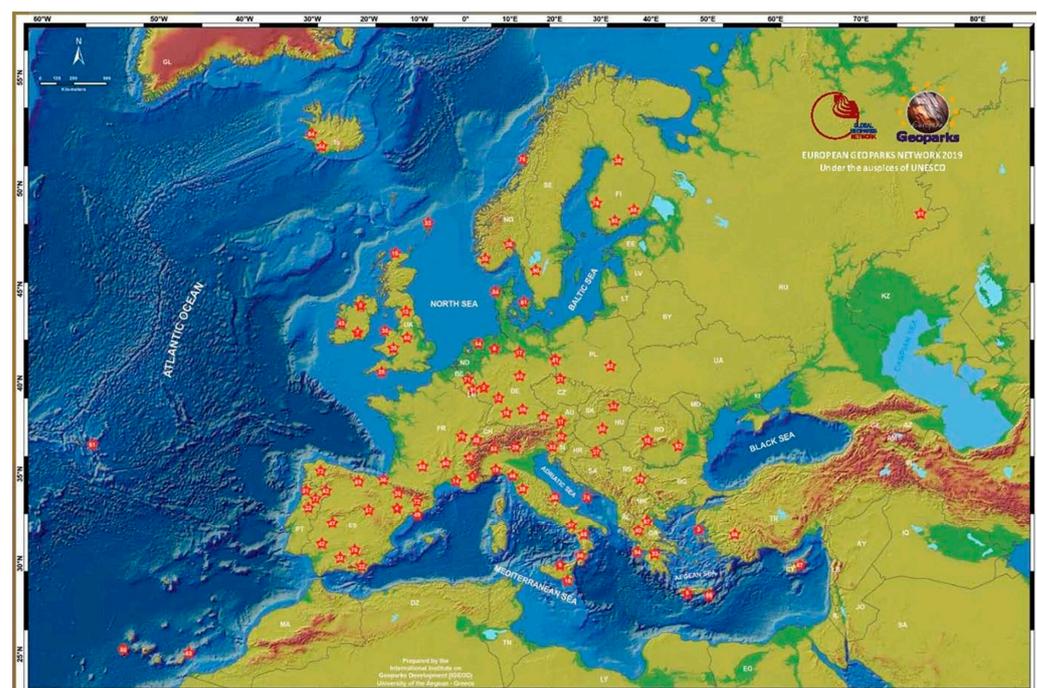

Figure 1. European Geoparks Network, location of geoparks—red asterisk (europeangeoparks.org) (accessed on 15 January 2023).

Currently, the term geopark is a frequently used term, but there is a small percentage of the population that truly understands the essence of a geoparks [28]. It follows from this that the promotion and marketing of geoparks are low, and it is necessary to increase them. That is also why it is necessary to investigate this area, analyze the network of geoparks, their marketing strategy and find solutions for other geoparks that have many geological gems [31]. It is a survey of the information that individual geoparks from the EGN network present on their websites in the online space to point out the necessity to pay attention to this sphere of geopark marketing. Marketing is a strong and necessary tool in the field of managing geoparks and represents a key role in fulfilling the goals in this area. Publications dealing with the online marketing of geoparks are missing; most authors deal with the role of geoparks in the promotion of earth sciences, geosciences, geoheritage, etc. [34,35]. Another group of works is articles dealing with the websites of individual geoparks and their specifics [36,37].

In talking about a geopark as a destination, "destination" can be conceptualized in the context of four possible perspectives: geographical, marketing, sociological and transdisciplinary [38]. As to the marketing, it can be understood as a certain set of resources, which is a prerequisite for the creation of a geotourism product [39]. These resources represent a set of territory opportunities. Matlovičová and Matlovič [40] also present another categorization of the territory's resources as: "Physical capital of a tourist destination consists of physical attributes of the environment, such as buildings, objects, material attractions, financial capital, the geographical location itself, which represents a very valuable resource".

The intangible capital of a tourist destination consists of social capital, that is, the quality of human resources such as experience, judgment, wit, reputation, individual skills of managers, administrative workers, local stakeholders or residents, with whom they can enrich the product of the destination and thus contribute to its development. Organizational capital is the formal territory management structures, formal and informal planning, management and coordination systems and informal relations within the destination territory and its surroundings [40].

Figure 2 presents a more specific understanding of the resources forming the territory called "Destination 6A" according to Buharis [41].
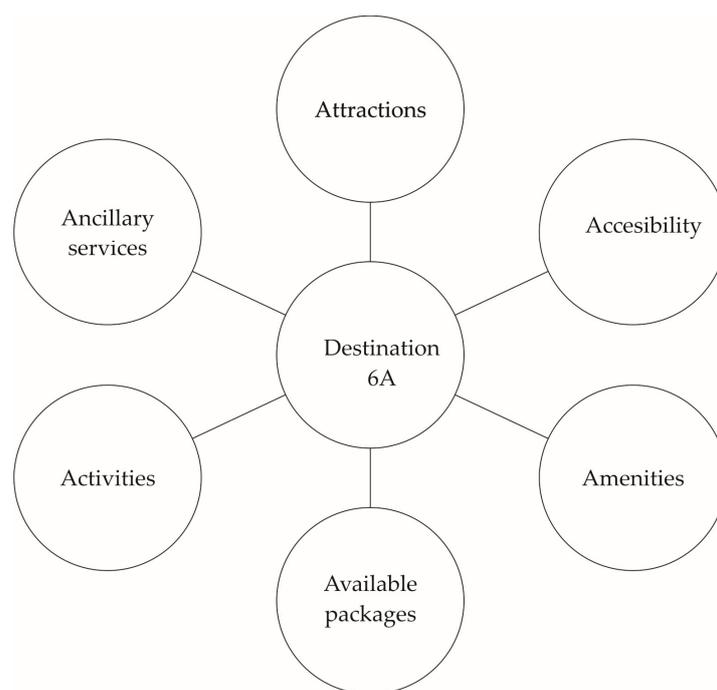

Figure 2. Destination 6A. (Prepared according to [41]).

Motivation, interest and target group

The prerequisite for the realization of any form of tourism is the potential of the country and the offer on which the interest of the client—tourist, vacationer—depends. It is essential to look at tourism from the view of a tourist—a visitor and their motivation in this area. The motivation of human behavior is a very large and complex area of research. In order to study human behavior, motivation, that is, many determinants that influence this behavior, must be studied. Human activity is determined and regulated by a certain system of features, needs, interests, goals or processes, which are usually referred to as motives and together create the so-called incentive system [42]. Motivation is, of course, the driving force in general, but in the field of this topic, it is necessary to orientate, follow and arouse the interest of the tourist in the field of geotourism.

Characterization of the target group is derived from market segmentation. Market segmentation represents the division of the market into homogeneous groups that differ from each other in their characteristics, needs and purchasing behavior; therefore, it is possible to act on them with a modified marketing mix [43]. Novacká [44] considers the clientele segment to be a certain group or subset of persons with specific characteristics or interests from the entire given group of people [45]. In market segmentation, there are two basic approaches [46]:

1. Tree approach is based on the division of the whole into individual categories based on various characteristics.
2. Factor approach is based on individual sub-characteristics and finds significant connections and mutual relations between them, based on which it constructs a segment.

The target group can be characterized in accordance with the following criteria [41]:

- Geographical criteria—climatic conditions, population density, area of the district, towns and villages.
- Demographic criteria—gender, age, orientation, education, family size, birth rate, race, belief in religion, social inclusion, stage of the household-family life cycle.
- Psychographic criteria—way of life, nature of personality and its characteristics.
- Behavior—values, user status, opportunities, credibility status, degree of readiness, attitudes [47].

The segmentation of geotourism as a marketing product in the tourism industry means the division of consumers of the product into relatively homogeneous groups and, thus the determination of the geotourism target market according to common characteristics [48].

It is interesting to pay attention to the psychographic view, which quite clearly describes the division of visitors according to their needs and mindset, which is very important for marketing and addressing the visitors. Cohen [49,50] divides tourists into six groups according to the type of experiences they expect [51]:

1. Recreational tourist—interested in the physical rather than the cultural or social content of recreation.
2. Diversionary tourist (looking for diversity)—tries to forget the worries of everyday life.
3. Experiential tourist—looking for authentic experiences.
4. Experimental tourist—looking for closer contact with local culture.
5. Existential tourist—has the intention to immerse and merge with the life of different cultures and lifestyles.

The division according to Hose [52] is very relevant for geotourism, which divides geotourists based on expectations and satisfaction within the framework of a visit to a specific geolocality into two basic groups [53]:

1. Learning geotourists—studying geology as part of study programs, from preschool age to university students.
2. Recreational geotourists—individuals or groups of people whose idea of an ideal vacation is visiting places with nice views of the surroundings, observing fossils, rock outcrops in the field or visiting mineralogical sites.

Another very descriptive and already very specific division of a specific group of geotourists is the division given by Grant [54,55]:

1. Geo-expert—educated with an interest in a specific location.
2. Geo-specialists—having an education in the field of geosciences or related fields.
3. Geo-amateurs—without education, the visit to a place depends on interest in a specific area.
4. Interested visitors —without interest in geotourism as such but likes to discover new things.
5. Informed visitors—with basic information about the visited site.
6. Uninformed visitors—without any information and expectations.

Within all these divisions, it is necessary to think about how the geopark wants to address individual target groups, and in what way to characterize the target groups. It is advisable to apply a general rather than a very specific approach to sorting geoparks according to the mentioned divisions, which results in many products for smaller target groups. A more general approach will allow us to reach target groups with a broader purpose, but at the same time, quite effectively. That is, the classic classification mentioned by Čuka [47], where demographic and psychographic criteria are concerned, while the individual's behavior is also considered, taking into account the required general approach and addressing a broader purpose. The combination with the selection according to Cohen [49], also represents efficiency.

The aim of the paper is to study the package of information provided from the perspective of potential visitors by an analyses of the complexity of the websites of geoparks in the European Geopark Network (EGN).

2. Materials and Methods

The analysis consisted of several steps. The first step was a survey of the Internet websites of the European Geopark Network [56], which includes all members (77 members, 7 geoparks had no link on EGN website, December 2021), on the number of clicks from the main page to the page of selected geoparks. Subsequently, a survey of the offer of the geopark website was conducted. In the case of an inactive geopark website link, it was necessary to search for the geopark website on the Internet. The aim of this step was to obtain a comprehensive view of the offer of geopark websites participating in the EGN for potential visitors. Every ordinary visitor who is considering a visit or activity in a certain location is confronted with searching for available information in the online space. It is, therefore, essential to highlight the importance of the overall image of websites and the content they are filled with. The way in which the visitors come to information in the online space definitely forms part of their opinion or even influences their judgment, whether they will get enough information, whether they will visit the site and, therefore, use its available offer. It is, therefore, essential to evaluate criteria such as the availability of information, the type of information, the addressability of the information and the number of clicks when obtaining the target information, as well as the structure of the offer of activities and activities of the particular geopark. In order to obtain information about the complexity of websites, categories of searched information were chosen, which were divided into subgroups that specifically described the content of the searched information. The marketing categorization and type of information searched are shown in Table 1. The merit of the searched information and its collection is formed (inspired) by the 4P marketing mix model [57–59], which was sufficient and represented the most effective choice in categorization. Of course, individual topics are selected and adapted to the activities that result from the function of the geopark. The 4P matrix (Table 1) was created by the authors, which classified information into individual parts from the point of view of the 4P marketing mix model. The nature of the information is related to the values and functions of the geopark. The categorization of information in the table focuses on general information about the values of geoparks and, at the same time, on important information from the point of view of promotion for the potential visitor. On the website,

the potential visitor of the expected visit—the so-called full-service place (the geopark website)—finds conveniently complete information regarding the geopark and its values, offers for tourists, information about the price, routes and options, what is in the geopark in terms of activities and options and what to do in the geopark. The categorization starts with general information about the values of the geopark and gradually moves to groups of important information from the point of view of the visitor who is interested in visiting the geopark. Another important step in the analysis was the study of articles related to the functioning of geoparks, similar articles on the marketing tools of geoparks and the search for relevant sources on the topic of the article. The study of resources was intertwined with the creation of categories for information search and contributed to the decision-making process of how to structure the information to display and cover, if possible, the entire structure of geopark activities that are essential for the visitors. The Goal Question Metric (GQM) was used, which is based on the assumption that for measuring in a purposeful way, it must first specify the goals for itself, then it must trace those goals to the data that are intended to define those goals and finally provide a framework for interpreting the data with respect to the stated goals. Thus, it is important to make clear, at least in general terms, what informational is needed on the geopark website, so that these needs can be quantified whenever possible, and the quantified information can be analyzed as to whether or not the goals are achieved.

A comparative analysis was used during the website survey, while the established topics were evaluated according to Table 1. The website analysis took place in December 2021 and January 2022. When evaluating geopark websites, a methodology was used to score the completeness of information about the location [60]. A rating system on a scale from 1 to 5 was set for the overall general evaluation of the website's structure, which indicated the completeness of the page for the visitors looking for information. An assessment of 5 represented a comprehensive site providing all necessary information regarding the geopark from a general description of significant sites according to their typology (e.g., geological, geomorphological, historical, cultural and similar), which presented a clear picture of natural, historical or cultural values, and also contained clear information about activities, events of different nature and for different target groups. The rating of 1 represented a site with a large deficit of information (or a very confusing page) for the visitors, while it was necessary to independently search for basic information about the geopark or about the activities it offers. Such presentation of the product greatly discourages potential visitors and contributes to low efficiency in meeting the goals of the marketing strategy.

Evaluation of the complexity of information "in one place" within the evaluated categories (that is, in the system of the geopark's own website):

5—a complex and refined site from the point of view of general and marketing benefits; high availability of information in all categories; the visitor does not need to search on other sites.

4—a refined page with high availability of information for the visitor; the visitor generally does not need to visit other websites; the existence of products and tools from the point of view of marketing.

3—the site is quite good; mostly complete in general terms; information resulting from the nature and function of the geopark and key components characterizing the geopark; missing information from the point of view of geotourism activities.

2—a page with information of a general nature; it does not give the visitor a comprehensive view of the services and possibilities in the geopark; the visitor must obtain information from other sources before or during the visit.

1—the page only briefly informs the visitor about the general nature of the geopark; there is a lot of missing information of a general nature or the nature and function of the geopark, for example, a deficit of educational activities or activities or another of the key components characterizing the geopark.

Table 1. A marketing categorization and the type of information searched in the website survey (prepared by authors).

THEMES		Marketing Categories
Geopark heritage	Natural heritage Historical heritage Significance objects Cultural heritage and local products	PRODUCT
Antropogenic attractions	Thematic routes Events Educational activities Adrenaline and sport activities Product package Family Product package Education Product package Adrenaline/Sport	
Tourist infrastructure	Tourist information centers Museums Tourist routes Guide services Information boards General infrastructure	PLACE
Supporting infrastructure	Accomodation Restaurants	
Cooperations	Educational institutions Goverment bodies Bussiness sphere	
Informations about price and online purchaces	Museum tickets Promotinal an educational materials Events tickets Geopark local products Online ticket (possibility of online purchase)	PRICE
Social networks and platforms	Facebook Instagram Youtube Twitter LinkedIn Website Newsletters Click on social network Languages options (except for original) E-shop Application	PROMOTION
Promotional and educational materials available online	Leaflets Brochures Maps Books Logo Products, merchendise Mascot, patron	

Another important consideration was the availability of information about location and infrastructure, information and educational facilities, even transport accessibility in some cases and visitor services, such as guide services, bicycle rentals and other types of equipment, resources and tools. The clarity of the page and the availability of the information searched were also evaluated, whether a link to related pages was provided (for example, service providers such as accommodation, restaurants, the possibility of booking, etc.) or whether the visitors had to search for them independently. Necessary

information for the visitors is also information regarding operating hours, tickets, online or on-site purchase options, reservations and the like. At the present time, the existence of social networks is equally essential for any establishment whose goal is to become visible, interested, or reach a certain target group, and this criterion was also included in the set of searched information. In practice, this meant finding the geopark accounts on social pages (or examining the structure of their activity, which would be interesting for the expansion of this survey in the future).

Categories of information in the EGN Geoparks Web Site Survey Rating Table:

- Natural heritage: information available on the site of a specific geopark regarding natural heritage, fauna and flora, geotopes, geological history, natural environment and characteristics forming the geopark.
- Historical objects, Significant objects: existing information available on the geopark website, which informs the visitor about historically and culturally significant objects related to the historical and cultural development of locations in the geopark.
- Local product, Thematic trips, Events, Educational activities, Promotional activities: existing information available on the geopark website regarding the offer of local products or branded products belonging to the GeoFOOD network. These products can be of a food or other nature, but they are typical for the given territory and support the activities of the geopark. The existence of information regarding thematic paths, routes and territories that characterize the localities, a group of information for the potential visitor regarding events, whether past or future and last but not least, an important group of available information that also results from the nature and function of the geopark are educational and educational activities.
- Product package children/family, product package education, product package adrenaline/sports: information available on the geopark website regarding the existence of the so-called "product packages" or tailor-made products for visitors who are interested in a complex thematic product, while not having to deal with the provision of secondary services. These can be stays or service packages with a certain focus, for example, intended for families with children, products for more active people interested in sports, active leisure time or products oriented or supplemented with adrenaline activities. In this category, the existence of geopark activities from individual areas is not evaluated, such as whether the geopark provides educational activities. It is a marketing product whose task is to address a specific visitor or a group of visitors with the comfort of complex services; thus the potential visitor does not have to deal with securing a secondary offer of services associated with stays in the geopark. These products can be created and offered by the geopark directly or indirectly through local travel agencies.
- Tourist infrastructure, General infrastructure, Supporting infrastructure, Cooperation: information regarding the tourist infrastructure and availability within tourist information points, museums, description of tourist routes and trails in the territory of geoparks, offers of guide services and services of a similar nature. The category of information available on the geopark website about the general infrastructure, which provides the potential visitor with the availability of the geopark, how the visitor can get to the geopark, what modes of transport are available or the availability of online maps and information about orientation in the geopark. The category provides information about the possibilities of barrier-free access within the geopark. Another group of assessment of accessibility within the infrastructure is information that provides information within the possibilities of catering and accommodation services and possible links to specific entities providing these secondary services. In this category, information is also sought regarding cooperation with individual entities that participate in the functioning and support of the geopark within educational institutions, projects, municipalities or other supporting entities.

- Pricing information—Museum admission, Promotional materials, Educational materials and activities, Admission events, Local products, Buying tickets online: Information regarding the possibility of finding prices within the geopark and its facilities.
- Social networks and platforms: evaluates the existence and presentation of information about geoparks within social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others, as well as whether the page offers a link to click through to the platforms of these social networks. The category also deals with the possibility that some geoparks offer the subscription to a newsletter about activities, activities, development and other information within the geopark and its territory. It should be noted that the existence of e-shops and applications is also becoming an expanding area within marketing activities.

In addition to the existence of these accounts, attention was also paid to the link from the website to the social networking platforms. Acquaintance with news or current affairs happening in the geopark also takes place through the subscription of newsletters, which was monitored in the survey.

Procedure of research steps:

1. Creating a 4P matrix, Table 1.
2. Visiting the home page of EGN members, linking to individual geoparks.
3. Visiting the website of the geopark, searching for information according to the matrix established by the authors.
4. Creating a database according to the 4P matrix for individual geoparks. The GQM method was used.
5. Data evaluation in the form of a graph according to logical groups (areas) of the 4P marketing mix.
6. Drawing conclusions from research.

3. Results

The evaluation of the research is represented in figures that show the state of the available information in the online space of geoparks.

A survey of the available information presenting the heritage of the geopark indicates to a large extent that the websites are filled with enough information. This information presents natural, historical and cultural heritage; important objects in the geopark; organized events, tourist routes, educational activities or the possibility of sports or adrenaline activities to the visitors. The percentage of EGN geoparks that provide visitors with general basic information on their website represents a value of over 94%, i.e., 66 geoparks. For information on natural heritage, almost 76%, i.e., 53 geoparks; for information on historical objects, about 93%, i.e., 65 geoparks; on other important objects, more than 71%, i.e., 50 geoparks. With regard to natural heritage, geoparks sufficiently fill their pages with necessary and factual information. However, when considering other categories, such as historical objects, cultural heritage and other significant objects, the very nature of individual geoparks and the structure of their heritage must be considered. The information in the investigated categories covers the elementary level of necessary information for the visitor. The geopark product, in general, includes not only the heritage itself, but also related activities such as organizing events, themed trips, educational, recreational or sports activities for marketing purposes. The degree of awareness of the potential visitor is over 91% for events, over 87% for thematic trips, over 72% for educational activities and over 67% for sports and adrenaline activities (Figure 2).

It is necessary to comment on the provided information regarding education. Education, as one of the main functions of the geopark, should represent one of the most important areas of the geopark presentation. This percentage does not express the deficit of the educational function of geoparks, but it points to the low level of information provided on the geopark website, which, on the contrary, should be the main theme of the information presented. Information on sports activities is also affected by the fact that not

every geopark offers such activities, which is not as much of a problem as the absence of educational information.

As part of the specification of the marketing product, it is necessary to focus gradually on the creation of marketing product packages that will provide the visitor with the comfort of complete services associated with a trip, activity or visit to a destination. Product packages are meant not as an elementary offer of geopark "products" such as an offer of natural, cultural and other aspects as such, but it is an offer of a created product in the form of a trip, stay or activity with a complete service related to it. These "tailor-made" products make the offer of geoparks more attractive and modern, appeal to more potential visitors, reduce the time spent by visitors in organizing and planning a trip or stay and thus represent a certain added value within the offer of geoparks. For this reason, values found by inspecting the websites of EGN clearly indicate that the geoparks are only very slowly deploying this trend of "tailor-made" services or activities. Three basic categories of product packages were selected, which were focused on in the survey. The survey revealed a very positive fact, namely that geoparks are modernizing their product spectrum, and thus mostly in the field of education, where about 41%, i.e., 29 geopark websites, offer product package Education; more than 17%, i.e., 12 geopark websites, offer product package Family; and almost 9%, i.e., 6 geopark websites offer product package Adrenaline/Sport (Figure 3). Nowadays, the modern age forces subjects of any type, companies or other organizations, to offer the customer/visitor, the greatest possible added value, the greatest comfort (time, financial) and take over activities that were previously provided by the customer/visitor themself. This trend should open a reconsideration of the marketing offer of geoparks to visitors.
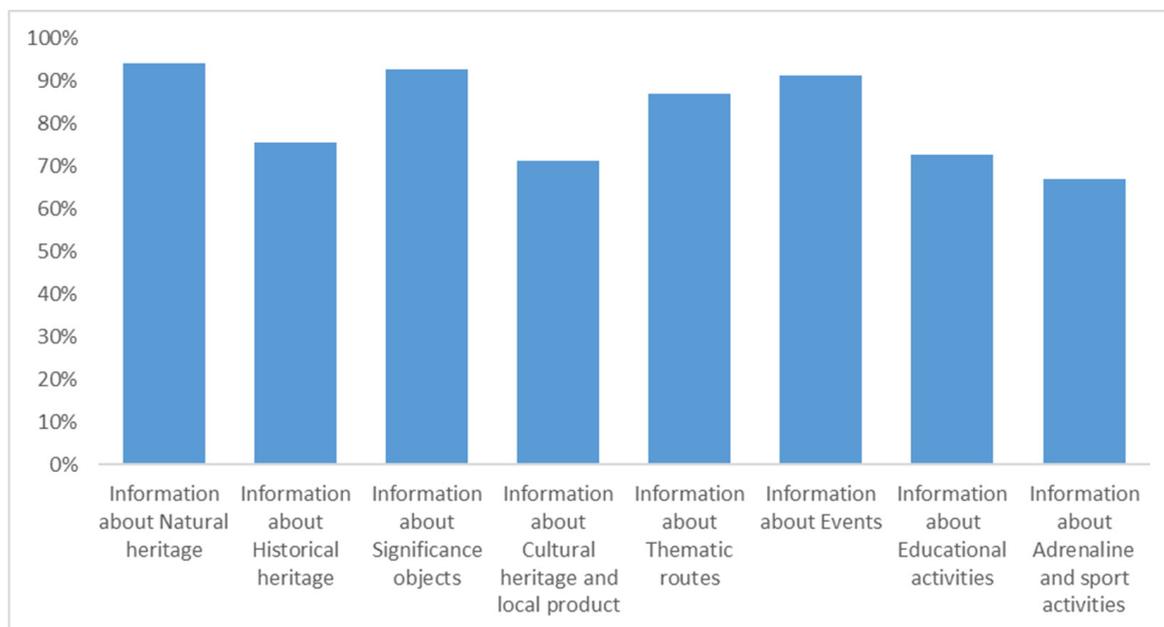
Figure 3. Available information on geopark values and activities.

Geoparks that had a complete offer of product packages, i.e., all three investigated categories: Reserve Géologique de Haute Provence (France), Papug Geopark (Croatia), Bakony-Balaton Geopark (Hungary), Geopark Bergstrasse—Odenwald (Germany), Central Catalonia Geopark (Spain), Sobrarbe Geopark (Spain).

Due to product modernization and the overall online marketing space, it is necessary to pay attention to information about prices, entrance fees to museums or events or other activities of the geopark, as well as prices related to presentation, education or promotion materials (Figure 4). Visitors want to be informed, and nowadays, it is quite common to find out prices and similar information online before traveling or visiting. The survey

proves that this information is absent as a basic attribute of informing the visitor. For the visitors, it is essential to know what prices are in the geopark or whether it is possible to buy a ticket online to the museum, for an event or for other activities. Currently, such information is a completely common, if not necessary, part of any offer. It is for these reasons that it is necessary to pay extra attention to this information. The survey results show that only a very small part of geoparks provide this information on websites, as only 4.3% (3 geoparks) offered the possibility of purchasing tickets online, while approx. 10% (7 geoparks) offered event tickets; almost 16% (11 geoparks) promoted local products and 30% (21 geoparks) also offered promotional and educational materials (Figure 4).
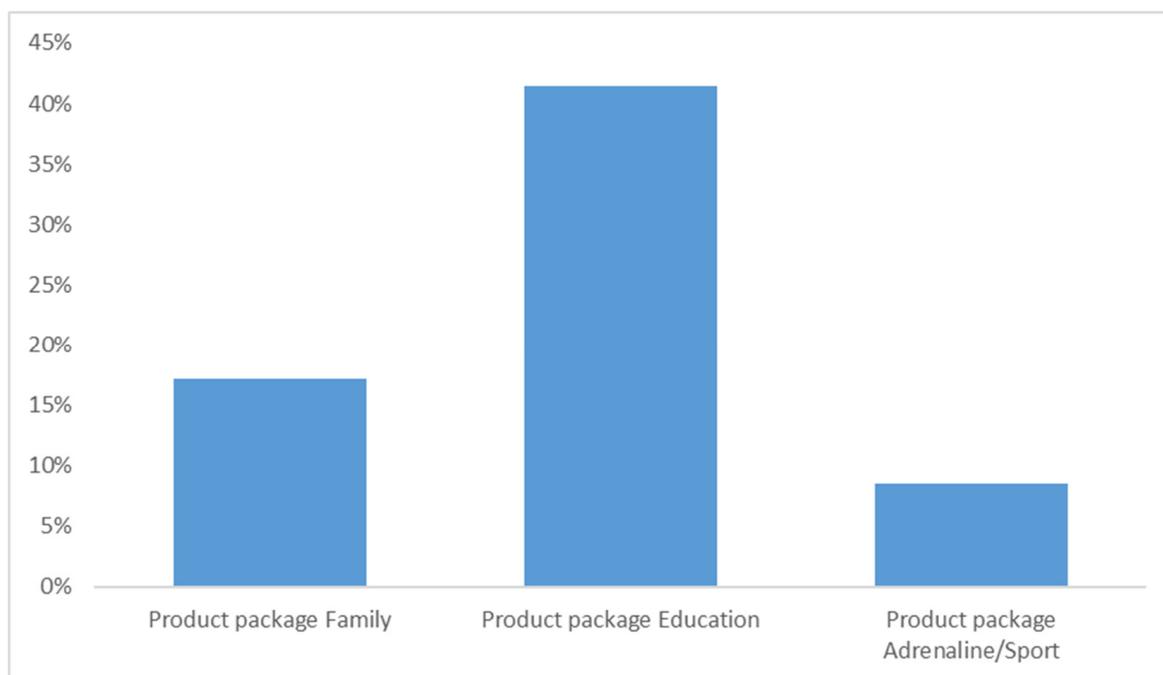
Figure 4. Tailored product packages of EGN geoparks for specific target groups.

Excellent availability of price information was offered by geoparks such as Papug Geopark (Croatia), Bakony-Balaton Geopark (Hungary), Nature Terra Vita Geopark (Germany), Petrified Forest of Lesvos (Greece). The deficit of this information was found on the websites of geoparks: Troodos Geopark (Cyprus), Rokua Geopark (Finland) and Hondsrug Geopark (Netherlands).

The representation of social networks in the marketing of geoparks is shown in Figure 5, while, currently, the existence of an account on social networks is a necessity in marketing activities. It is possible to make contact in several ways, namely by searching for a specific name, or the information can be given through the activities of friends or by localization. Promotion on social networks is a very effective and modern way of presentation since (regardless of the type of social network) the existence of accounts on these networks is nowadays almost a matter of course. It is a very positive finding that geoparks take this fact into account in their marketing strategy. This is also evidenced by the values found in individual categories: >97% (68 geoparks) had an account on the social network Facebook, almost 89% (62 geoparks) had Instagram, ~83% (58 geoparks) had YouTube and ~63% (44 geoparks) had Twitter. Approximately 73%, i.e., 51 geoparks, provide direct links to these platforms. More than 38%, i.e., 27 geoparks, provide the possibility of receiving newsletters regarding information and activities about their geopark. Another modern way of promotion, in the form of a mobile application, was offered by only about 21%, i.e., 15 geoparks (Figure 5). This application would also be worth the effort to develop since the accessibility to information of today's generation is immediate through

mobile phones. In this regard, the existence of an application would represent a convenient way of getting information.
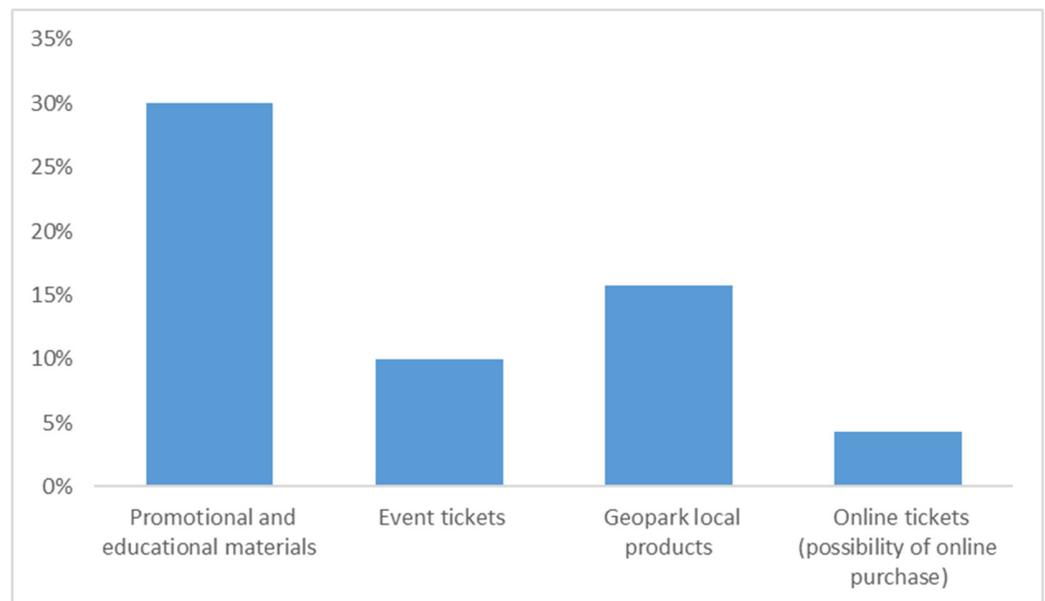

Figure 5. Available information about EGN geopark prices and online sales.

The information presented in Figures 6 and 7 is related to infrastructure. In Figure 6, the available information regarding the infrastructure of the geoparks is presented. For the visitor, the availability of information about the place visited is important. Within the infrastructure of the geoparks, the information was found by surveying the websites at a sufficient level, and the geoparks take care to provide substantial information to a sufficient extent on their website. Before the visit, the visitor wants to know what is in the geopark in addition to the heritage and activities, what museums, information centers, tourist routes or guide services are offered in the geopark, at what time the visitor can visit these attributes, what are the conditions of entry and whether there are any. All this information is crucial for the visitor, and it is essential that the pages contain this information.
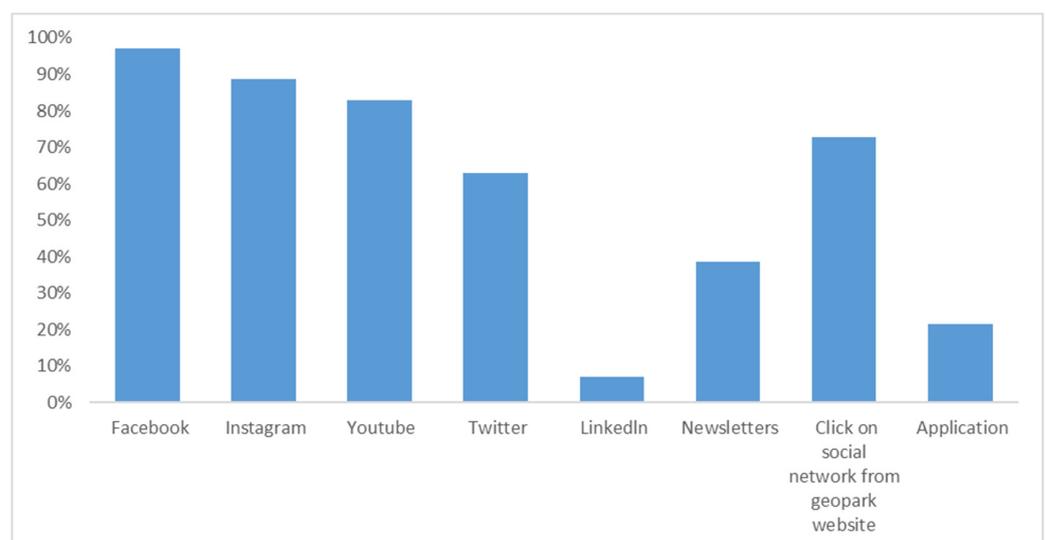

**Figure 6.** EGN geoparks social media and communication platforms.
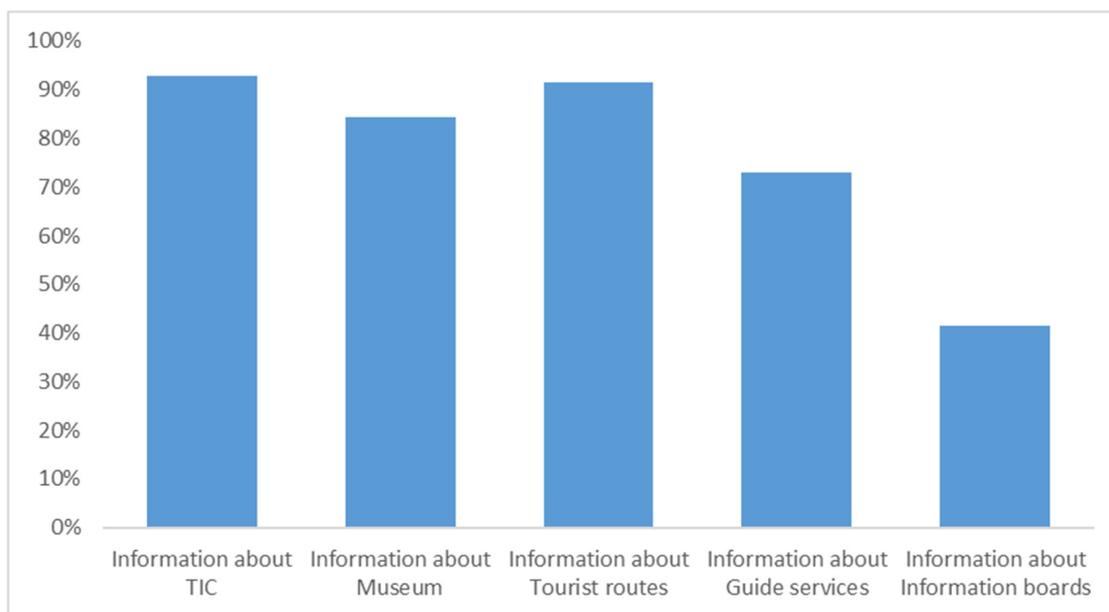
Figure 7. Available information about EGN geopark infrastructure.

The availability of data on tourist information centers was provided by almost 93% (i.e., 65 geoparks), information about museums was provided by approx. 84% (i.e., 59 geoparks), information about tourist routes was provided by more than 91% (i.e., 64 geoparks), guided services were listed by almost 73% (51 geoparks) and data on information boards are offered by more than 41%, i.e., 29 geoparks (Figure 6).

Figure 7 presents information regarding the general infrastructure, which is also as important as the previously studied information on the infrastructure of the geopark for visitors. Data were searched for in the following categories:

- Available information about the location of the geopark;
- How to get there;
- The restrictions;
- The possible transport;
- The conditions of transport.

Information regarding the offer of local services, which is very important for geoparks for their support, was also examined. It should be noted that the relationship between the geoparks and local service providers must work both ways, which means that mutual support and cooperation are essential. The geoparks attract visitors to service providers located on the territory of the geopark, and, at the same time, these service providers support the geoparks in expanding and maintaining their secondary offer (restaurant services, accommodation services, etc.) and indirectly support the activity of the geoparks and the level of services provided. Without mutual support and cooperation, the desired effect disappears. Both parties must take advantage of the opportunity for mutual connection (common territories) and use it to their advantage. Therefore, it is essential that information about available local services is also provided to the visitors on the website. Visitors searching for information about the planned place of visit on the geopark website can get information on the local offer or a link to the information on the page. Visitors obtain the information about the accommodation or use the link to the page of accommodation and immediately book the accommodation. The same applies to the catering services and their options. The questionnaire survey of geoparks showed that accommodation facilities are offered on the websites of almost 66%, i.e., 46 geoparks and catering services are offered by almost 63%, i.e., 44 geoparks. Geoparks should pay more attention to this information—both for the comfort of visitors planning to stay and for cooperation with the service providers of the local services. From the questionnaire survey, we see that, according to the available

information, geoparks in the EGN network are supported almost equally by the public and private sectors, as much as 74% (52 geoparks) are supported by government bodies, 70% (49 geoparks) are supported by the business sphere and almost 56% (39 geoparks) are supported by educational institutions (Figure 7).

Figure 8 refers to the educational and promotional materials on the website of geoparks, particularly online flyers, presentation brochures, maps, online books about the geopark or other related promotional merchandising products (not products from local offer). The results show these materials are offered on websites as online brochures by almost 79%, i.e., 55 geoparks; leaflets are offered by approx. 89%, i.e., 62 geoparks; and maps are offered by almost 93%, i.e., 65 geoparks. About 47%, i.e., 33, of geoparks offer books on the website, which positively determines the educational area of the website. It should be noted that the promotion category also includes the presentation through merchandising of products that geoparks offer physically, but the offer on the website is largely absent in this category because only 34%, i.e., 24 geoparks, have this kind of promotion integrated into their web offer. Methods of presentation effectively addressing the target group of children are presentations through geopark mascots, fairy-tale creatures and the like. Tying activities and subjects to stories, fairy tales, historical fables and rumors represents a diversification of the elementary offer of the geopark and will effectively interest this target group. In addition to fairy-tale creatures, there is a very modern way of presentation through an influencer (actor, presenter, publicly known personality) who promotes the place with their presence and activities. In this way, the visitor's attention will be attracted, and the visitor will be interested in the location. This method is currently a very modern means of presenting entities and activities, and represents an effective acquisition of new interested parties, visitors and customers in any field. The online space plays an important role since the activity of these "influencers" takes place in the online space, mostly on social networks. However, the research showed that this effective method of arousing interest among potential visitors was on websites in only 7%, i.e., 5 geoparks and the e-shop platforms are presented on the website by only 20%, i.e., 14 geoparks (Figure 8).
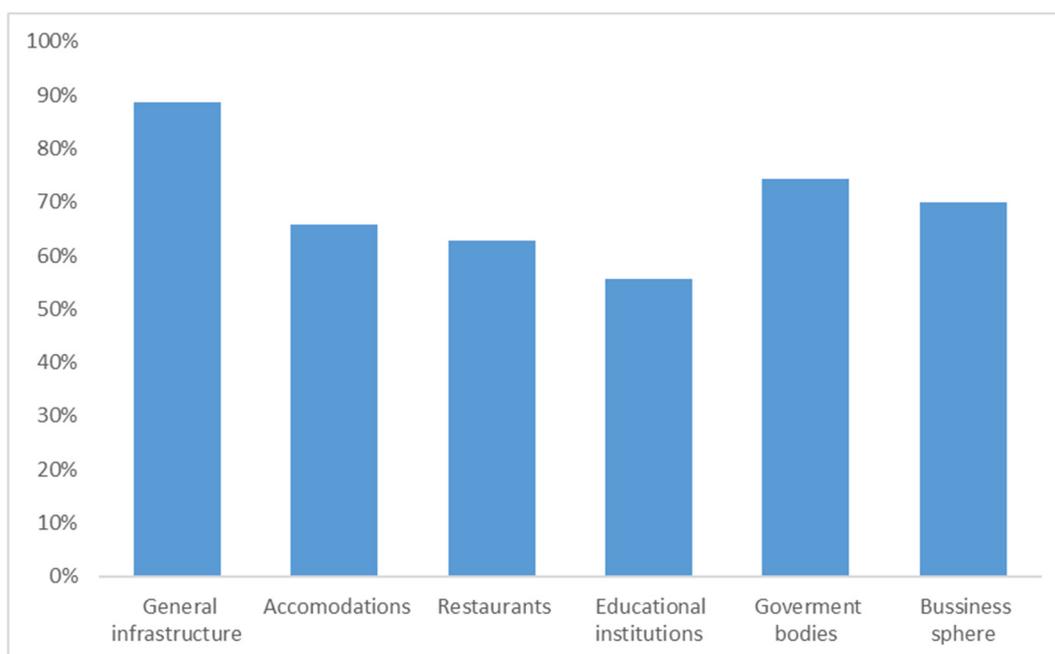

Figure 8. Available information about EGN geopark general infrastructure, secondary offer and cooperation.

The best-rated geopark websites—score 5:

- Reserve Géologique de Haute Provence, France;
- Parrot Geopark, Croatia;
- Central Catalonia Geopark, Spain;
- Adamello Brenta Geopark, Italy;
- Bohemian Paradise Geopark, Czech Republic;
- Bakony-Balaton Geopark, Hungary.

The worst-rated geopark websites—score 1:

- Molina and Alto Tajo Geopark, Spain;
- Troodos, Cyprus;
- Copper Coast Geopark, Ireland.

4. Discussion

Geoparks included in the EGN network undoubtedly represent a certain brand of quality, effective organizational unit and management structure. The necessity of having a marketing strategy follows from the membership, which is unquestionable, because it is one of the conditions of management. However, the results of the research concluded on the deficit in the presented information, with which individual websites are filled and nowadays often represent a factor in the effectiveness and success of reaching target groups of potential visitors. It is necessary to discuss the content of the published information, topicality and structure, and above all, to think about the activities and values of the geopark as a marketing product, which must have a clear structure, goal and vision. Structure means specific activities and planning of these activities or the presented values of the geopark. Goal means what the geopark wants to achieve with presentation and activity, and the vision means a long-term direction—the focus of individual goals, and that is, for example, education, raising the awareness of society and the like. Within the discussion, it is possible to open many topics, but the basic idea of this research points to the need to set up a certain unified system or structure of information presented on websites. The necessity of this is also determined by the rapidly developing society; it has incorporated the online space as a strategic area of management in any sector. Another important piece of information that emerges from the research is the fact that geoparks present and offer geological heritage to potential visitors. While the way they plan to visit the territory and manage the trip is often up to them, marketing products that offer the visitor packages of complex services linked to a visit to the geopark (e.g., thematic trips with a complete service of accommodation, catering, guiding and other related services) are absent in their portfolio. In today's busy times, geoparks should focus on marketing products that are tailor-made for different groups of potential visitors. In this case, the visitors order a product that includes the complete care associated with visiting a geo-location or more geo-locations, thus eliminating the need for planning and organizing the trip. Figure 4 presents that only a few geoparks, less than 50%, offer price information and only 3 geoparks out of 70 offer the possibility of online ticket purchasing.

As for social networks, geoparks are doing well, even if there is a lack of social networks for young people, such as TikTok and Snapchat, which can attract the young generation [61]. Since one of the main goals of geoparks is education, the absence of these networks is considered a deficiency for geoparks. Geoparks should also deal with the issue of mobile technology use, which is highly topical at present, as it brings various possibilities in all aspects of life [62]. Another positive finding in the area of social networks, however, can be considered that geoparks understand the current trend of social network marketing and therefore offer the possibility to click directly on social networks on their pages. This option was offered by 51 geoparks out of 70 and offers current information about the activity of the geopark and at the same time a possibility to follow the activities of geoparks. Since the website is still considered the base of the marketing offer with all the components of the online promotion materials, it must also be considered critically. Flyers,

brochures and maps are the most represented items, which are just another form of classic printed promotion materials. Modern forms of promotion materials such as e-shops or mascots and patrons are represented only to a very small extent.

As the results of the SWOT Analysis (Figure 9) indicate, geoparks should focus on the current offer and adapt it to the changing environment as quickly as possible. This is the only way to ensure the connection of the online space and its offer with the territory of the geopark. Geoparks should also focus on new target businesses and create new products with the help of innovation in the area of supply. The offer itself should not only be on the website, but should also be accessible through mobile applications, of course in several languages. These results are in line with similar works that emphasize applications and offers in different languages and strengthen the brand of the geopark [63,64].
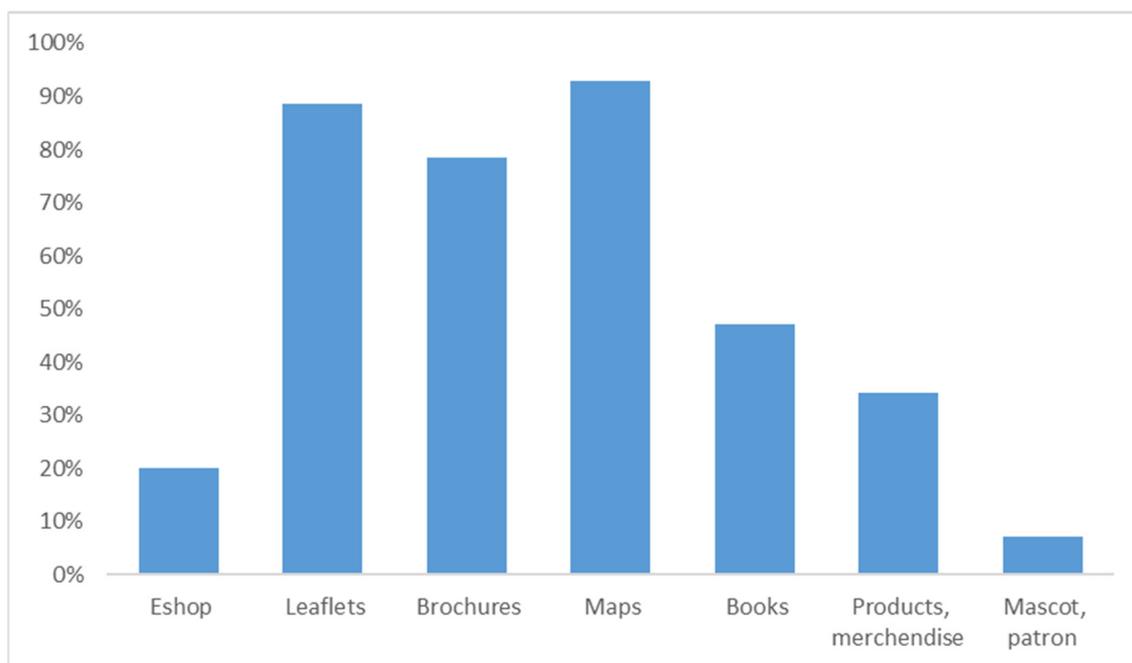

Figure 9. Available information about EGN geopark online promotional materials and e-shops.

5. Conclusions

Despite the facts mentioned above, marketing in EGN geoparks is at the level of classic marketing with low or passive activity on its websites (Figure 10). The fact that geoparks have understood the importance of social media marketing is positive, but the level of activities in this area is not yet sufficient. Although geoparks offer information about their "product" (natural heritage associated with culture and history) on their websites, they do not focus on the visitor in a modern marketing way of promotion or tailor-made products, which normally exist in the tourism industry.

The results show that geoparks should focus on new target groups and create new products that would attract geopark visitors who are not interested in geoparks. An example can be sports and experience product packages. Geopacks should follow modern marketing trends and innovations. Mobile applications, virtual tours and other innovations are becoming an integral part of modern websites. Several geoparks also lack a regular offer of services on websites such as e-shops or online booking and ticketing.

Online marketing is a key marketing tool in the current post-COVID-19 era, and potential visitors to tourism destinations (and thus also to geoparks) are increasingly guided and oriented by them. In this case, the online space represents the main source of information for them, which geoparks should take as a key fact. The solution is clearly the professionalization of marketing, which would undoubtedly represent an effective step in management. It is important to understand that the marketing of geoparks needs to be

condcuted at a professional level in the form of a separate position as a marketer of the geopark or leave marketing activities to marketing companies that offer these services at a professional level.

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
- available information about historical, cultural heritage, important objects in the geopark - promotion on social networks - availability information about tourist centers, museums, tourist routes and guided services - existing relationship between geoparks and local service providers - clasical promotional materials, particularly online flyers, presentation brochures, maps, online books	- not enough information about educational activities and sports and adrenaline activities - weak offer product package - not enough information about prices and online sale - promotion in the form of a mobile application - not enough information about information boards - low supported by educational institutions - addressing the target group of children are presentations through geopark mascots, fairy-tale creatures - largely absent offer of eshop and merchandising of products
Opportunities:	Threats:
- reach new target groups - educational and sports products - orient the web offer to mobile phones as well - innovations like virtual tours - creation partnerships with educational institutions - invite influencers and well-known personalities to the promo - improve trading on the web through the eshop - presentation of partners offering services through the geopark website	- low public awareness of geoparks - decreasing interest in geological heritage - orientation of the young generation more towards the online environment than towards nature - lack of interest in partnerships on the part of service providers - competition from new forms of tourism - low flexibility of website changes to a changing environment

Figure 10. SWOT Analysis of websites EGN geoparks.

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