



THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS IN TOURISM

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Abstract:

The development of communication and information technologies has influenced all forms of public communication and media. As a result, social media has transformed everyday communication and as well as consumer information in tourism. Social media and networking sites are essential tools for obtaining in-depth information about tourists' offer destination. The influence of social media on consumers in tourism is constantly growing, which affects tourists' decision-making to visit a destination and choice of accommodation facilities. The goal of this work is to determine the impact of social media on consumers when choosing accommodation facilities. The paper analyzes the views and ratings of consumers on the importance of social media in the promotion of tourism, the accuracy of information on social media, as well as the influence of digital information on the choice of accommodation facilities. The research was conducted through an online questionnaire on a random sample of respondents from Serbia. The results indicate that a high percentage of respondents are very satisfied with the information provided by social media and that they make a choice of accommodation facilities under the influence of that information. The research concludes that respondents use social media daily, that they get detailed information on social media when choosing a tourist destination and accommodation facilities, and that they do this for every trip.

Keywords:

tourism promotion, social media, influence, consumers, accommodation facilities.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a rapidly growing industry that successfully adapts to the needs of consumers with the application of various modern achievements. We can say that technological development had the greatest impact on changes in tourism. Namely, the development of communication and information technologies has influenced all forms of public communication and media. The dominant modern forms of information and communication in tourism are media platforms, social networks, and viral communities. The speed of communication and the viral spread of content are the main advantages of social media and its great popularity. Consumers in tourism mostly get information about the destination and accommodation facilities on the websites or social media of the carriers of the tourist offer. Tourists use social media both before the trip and during their stay at the destination, but also after returning from the trip. Tourists themselves are the creators

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of certain content, thus influencing the reputation of the destination itself or the accommodation facility, as well as the creation of their image. The aim of this paper is to determine the impact of social media on consumers when choosing accommodation facilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In tourism, technology plays an essential role by assisting businesses with daily operations, while at the same time improving the customer experience and making a destination more desired by potential visitors. For this reason, hotels, restaurants, airlines, and other companies must keep up with the latest technology trends (Giotis and Papadionysiou, 2022). The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) is visible in all stages of travel, that is, from the period in which potential tourists decide on the destination they will visit, when choosing a means of transport, creating an itinerary, deciding which accommodation they will choose and which services at the destination they will use, during the journey to the destination and stay in it, until returning from the destination to the permanent place of residence (Jević *et al.*, 2021, p. 141). Most travel decisions are influenced by information on social media and digital marketing (online information) (Armutcu *et al.*, 2023). The use of social networks is considered a powerful tool for choosing tourist destinations and accommodation facilities; as well as for enjoyment which emphasizes the role of entertainment provided by the social network and is a stronger predictor of consumer attitude and tourist behavior intention. (Di Pietro *et al.*, 2012).

There are differences between generations in the amount of media consumed. Thus, Kostić-Stanković and Vukmirović (2020) cite research results according to which as many as 47% of members of Generation Y (people born from 1981 to 1996) make consumer decisions under the influence of social media, and that approximately seven out of ten members of this generation was somewhat influenced by the opinions of other consumers when making a purchase decision (Jević, *et al.*, 2021). The most popular social media currently are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X (ex-Twitter). The website that has the most effect on the tourism sector is TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2021; Pontes and Ramos, 2023).

The importance of posts on social media is great considering that people, in principle, trust their peers, as well as those who have already gained experience in destinations and used services in tourism, more than marketing and commercial messages (Buhalis, and, Law, 2008; Süli and Martyn-Csamangó, 2020). Thanks to the ability to create and quickly share multimedia content, social networks enable a simple presentation of the tourist offer and facilitate the establishment of direct communication with tourists with the possibility of timely provision of all additional information at their request, all with minimal costs and time savings (Melović *et al.*, 2020, p. 140).

METHODOLOGY

The article analyzes:

- the attitudes and evaluations of consumers on the importance of social media in tourism promotion,
- the value and accuracy of the information found there,
- as well as the influence on the choice of accommodation capacity itself.

The research was conducted through an online questionnaire on a random sample of Serbian residents. The sample consisted of people of different gender, age, marital status, and work status. The sample for data processing consisted of a total of 115 respondents. The results are presented through descriptive statistics, with visualization using tables and graphs.



RESULTS

Most of the respondents who travel 2-4 times in one year (41.7%) were included in the survey. The social network most used when choosing accommodation is Instagram (53%), followed by Facebook and YouTube. Given that respondents most often spend 1-3 hours on social networks during the day (52.2%) or even 4-5 hours (27.8%), we can consider that the impact of all online information from networks that affect respondents is large. The main factors influencing respondents when choosing accommodation are prices and accommodation location. The largest number of respondents book their accommodation through reservation sites (63.5%), while the fewest do so through social networks. A large percentage of respondents believe that the information that can be found on social networks is good and accurate (38.3%), while the majority still cannot assess the accuracy of the information (46.1%). The method of the validity check information found on social networks about accommodation facilities is carried out by searching on the Internet (78.3%) or through the recommendations of friends. Only 19.1% of respondents have experience booking accommodation through social networks. Impressions related to booking accommodation through social networks are mostly positive: very simple and efficient; excellent; without objection; and very effective but there may be misunderstandings in communication.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Social media, with the development of technology, has become an important online tool that affects people's lives. Social media as an information channel, a communication channel, and a sales channel have a significant role in the world of digital marketing.

The social media that proved to be the most popular when it comes to researching destinations and accommodation is "Instagram". The results indicate that a high percentage of respondents are very satisfied with the information provided by social media and that they make a choice of accommodation facilities under the influence of that information. The inhabitants of Serbia use social media every day, when choosing a tourist destination, they most often get information on social media and they generally do this for every trip.

Owners of accommodation facilities should use social media promotion more professionally in order to achieve the maximum in achieving the communication and sales goals of their offer. In this way, it will maintain a quality relationship with consumers, upgrade communication following the needs of the market, and create a loyal relationship of consumers towards products and services. Proper promotion management on social networks will result in positive publicity within certain consumer groups, i.e. shaping and strengthening the brand's reputation.

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