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THE USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN TOURISM

PRIMENA MARKETINGA DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA U TURIZMU

Apstrakt: Korišćenje društvenih mreža je postao sastavni deo života mnogih generacija sadašnjice. Ovi alati bazirani na korišćenju web-a omogućili su turističkim kompanijama da utvrde potrebe turista i ostanu kompetentni na tržištu koje se kontinuirano menja. Stoga, ovaj istraživački rad predstavlja načine korišćenja društvenih mreža u turističkom marketingu, proširivanjem granica turizma na inovativan način. U vezi s tim, predmet ovog rada ogleda se u određivanju da li društvene mreže imaju pozitivan uticaj na poslovne performanse u turističkom sektoru, kao i kako uključiti ove alate u brend strategije turističkih kompanija. U izradi rada dominiraju sekundarni podaci iz akademskih publikacija u oblasti turizma, marketinga i informacionih tehnologija. Rezultati istraživanja potvrdili su početne hipoteze, pri čemu je ustanovljeno da društvene mreže imaju pozitivan uticaj na nameru kupovine od strane turista i na njihovu lojalnost brendu, čime su poboljšane performanse turističkih kompanija. Značaj rezultata istraživanja ogleda se u optimizaciji korišćenja društvenih mreža u turističkom marketingu kako bi se unapredio kvalitet turističkih usluga i povećao nivo zadovoljstva turista.

Ključne reči: turizam, marketing, društvene mreže, brend, namere u kupovini.

Abstract: Nowadays, the usage of social media has become integral part of life for many generations. These web-based tools have allowed tourism companies to identify tourists' needs and keep up with ever-changing market. Thus, this research paper presents the application of social media in tourism marketing, which extend tourism boundaries in innovative way. In this regard, the subject of the paper is to determine if social media have positive impact on business performances in tourism sector and how to incorporate these tools in tourism brand strategies. The paper is based on secondary data, gathered from academic publications from different scientific fields: tourism, marketing and IT. Research results confirmed the primary hypotheses, which indicated that social media have positive impact on tourists' purchase intentions and brand loyalty, through which business performances of tourism companies have been improved. The significance of the research results is reflected as the optimization of social media usage in tourism marketing in order to improve the quality of tourism services and tourists' satisfaction.

Key words: tourism, marketing, social media, brand, purchase intention.



Introduction

Information technologies (IT) have drastically changed tourism and hospitality sector, which could be observed when analysing both tourism supply and tourism demand (Yuan et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). These rapid advances in IT have changed the way consumers value, use and discuss hospitality and tourism products (Bowen & Whalen, 2017). In addition, ICTs have been able to support the industry's globalization process by providing effective tools for vendors to develop and distribute their products worldwide (Sani & Nomleni, 2018). Thus, "ITs have transformed tourism management and marketing from a static and utilitarian sense to a transformative conceptualization whereby tourism markets and actors both shape and are shaped by technology" (Sigala, 2018, pp. 151).

Nowadays, the Internet has become a dominant part of daily activities, with 4.88 billion users around the world (Kemp, 2021). The development of blogs and other social media has made it easier for all users to interact and communicate with other users in Web 2.0 era (Buhalis, 2019). Web 2.0 allowed users to transition from monologue to dialogue (Basyazicioglu & Karamustafa, 2018) and communicate and develop online content easier (Jaman & Anshari, 2021), transitioning from passive observers of online content to its generators (Gossling, 2021). This was the first postulate for developing electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). eWOM has been described as "any favourable or unfavourable communication made by prospective, existing or previous customers about a brand or organisation, which is capable of reaching to millions of individuals and organisations through the Internet" (Kala & Chaubey, 2018, pp. 144). The eWOM communication process has been accelerated by its recognition of reliability and credibility (Matute et al., 2016; Gvili & Levy, 2018). In this regard, Moran & Muzellec (2014)

defined 4C's of eWOM credibility: community, competence, content and consensus. Additionally, they pointed out that message credibility and source credibility are crucial in the Web 2.0 based marketing.

Attention of numerous researchers throughout years (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Teng et al., 2014; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Gvili & Levi, 2018; Fatma et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020; Pang, 2021) has been drawn by consumers' involvement on social media websites as a form of eWOM communication and a possibility to reinforce Social Media Marketing (SMM). Weinberg (2009) has explained SMM as the process of advertising an individuals' website, products or services through online social channels, while making it available for a much larger community.

Having this in mind, this research paper is based on three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Social Media Marketing has positive impact on business performance of tourism companies.

Hypothesis 2: Social Media Marketing has positive impact on tourists' purchase intention.

Hypothesis 3: Social Media Marketing has positive impact on tourists' brand loyalty.

In spite of the expansion of SMM, numerous problems remain unresolved. Marketers have not been certain of appropriate ways to measure the impact of their social media strategy. This uncertainty is additionally related to the process of structuring and boosting value-added relationships with customers through social media. Furthermore, Heggde & Shainesh (2018) pointed out the importance of evolving SMM as a separate marketing sub-discipline.

Methods

According to the subject and the defined research goals, the paper is based on secondary data, collected from academic

publications in different scientific fields: tourism, marketing and IT.

Based on the data collected, the results of the survey were compared in detail in two steps:

1. Application of Social Media Marketing in Tourism: Literature Review
2. Social Media Marketing Effects on Tourists' Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty

Application of social media marketing in tourism: Literature review

Social media generated significant impact on the use of the Internet, considering the large amount of information being disseminated by the Web 2.0. Individuals around the world can use social media tools to share and distribute information about any product or service industry (Pietro et al., 2012). In this vein, SMM has provided individual buyers and companies with the opportunities to participate in discussions about products or services and to enable their new market role – as influencers of specific marketing products and services around the world (Vinerean, 2017).

SMM has been a useful and nowadays – necessary - medium for all types of businesses and the term “social media marketing” has been argued in different ways (Dahnil et al., 2014; Alves et al., 2016; Stephen, 2016; Whiting & Deshpande, 2016; Yadav & Rahman, 2017; Icoz et al., 2018). Social media usage for marketing purposes has unleashed the abundance of data that tourism companies use for strategic insights (Jacobson et al., 2020). These companies have given a remarkable attention to product promotion and building/maintaining a favourable perception through social media. They have perceived the social media space as the fundamental hub they now consider when generating initial consciousness about the existence of a product and the motivation to use it (Kayumovich & Kamalovna, 2019).

Mkono and Tribe (2017) stated that existing research on tourism social media users has hardly ever outstretched beyond their role as an advocate of tourism products. These research papers (Milano et al., 2011; Hudson & Thal, 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Sahin & Sengun, 2015) focused on the Internet as a promotional tool of tourism services or on decision-making process when buying or collecting information about tourism products online. Thus, they have failed to identify different tourists' experiences in the pre-travel phase, as well as the change in their buying behavior when engaging with social media posts or using search engines.

Since social media appeared, tourism and hospitality have been ground breaking industries for the adoption of online reviews as a tool for collecting customer feedback (Lehto et al., 2007). Radical change in the ways tourism companies communicate and promote their products could be noticed since the adoption of SMM. On the other hand, social media have been used by tourists as well, when choosing a destination, hotel, restaurant or any other leisure activities. In this regard, it became increasingly important for tourism companies to establish a successful social media presence to engage with tourists. Traditional one-way communication strategies have lost credibility, which resulted in a growing importance of interactivity in online communication (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Review sites, such as Tripadvisor and Yelp, enabled consumers to express online eWOM influencing reputation, branding and business performance of tourism organisations (Buhalis, 2019).

Social media marketing effects on tourists' purchase intention and brand loyalty

As a form of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), shared travel experiences on social media have been playing an important



role in shaping tourists' awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Liu et al., 2019). The effects of social media sites on tourists include the following: (a) providing tourists with the necessary information about tourist attractions, (b) benefitting from guiding the client as a positive consumer to the service, (c) providing the tourist with safe distribution channels to purchase various tourism packages and (d) disseminating specific information about the travel packages and the variations that might occur during the trip (Alghizzawi et al., 2018). Forrester research (2007) has suggested that social media users' engagements differ by their primary life motivation. In this vein, Belarmino and Koh's (2018) study showed that differences in eWOM motivation lead to different ratings of the same hotel on different tourism websites.

The use of social media at different stages of their vacation has become increasingly important for tourists, including phases from planning and realising the trip to the final phase of sharing travel experiences. These travel experiences have been shared nowadays through social media in the form of photos, comments and reviews, easily accessible to others (Ho & Lee, 2015). Asongu and Odhiambo (2019) pointed out that the manner in which tourists search for potential destinations depends on how tourism companies use social media to influence tourists' choice of destinations. According to Destination Analyst Research (2019) 52% of recreational tourists used social media recommendations when travel planning. Hence, social media is an important component for online tourism domain in the context of planning trips through a search engine. (Rathore et al., 2017).

As mentioned previously, tourists found credibility of social media resources as one of the main criteria when buying tourism products. Tuclea et al. (2020) pointed out that the quality of generated content can widely vary, from high value content to ma-

nipulation, which has resulted in contamination of social networks with unwanted and unsecure content. Thus, this issue of assessing the credibility of information has exposed tourists to risks. Considering that the satisfaction of social media users with tourism companies has directly and positively influenced their trust in these companies (Martínez-Navalón et al., 2020), tourism supply should give thoughtful attention to the credibility of information posted online. In addition, these companies should have in mind that the increasing number of travelers have ability and possibility to gather information through social media. Thus, it is worthwhile to accept the advances made possible by social media and inevitable to avoid their acceptance by tourism marketers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Hua et al., 2017).

Furthermore, social media has enabled the tourism corporations to take full advantage of customer engagement strategies for developing customer-brand relationships (Aluri et al., 2019). Brand communication in social media is defined as any piece of brand-related communication "distributed via social media that enables internet users to access, share, engage with, add to, and co-create" (Alhabash et al., 2017, p. 286). Brand fan pages on social media (such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) have been created by tourism companies, which has allowed them to publish brand posts, containing videos, messages, quizzes, information and other material (Soegoto & Utomo, 2019), enabling that communications between brand and tourists have no restrictions in terms of time, location and media (Chen & Lin, 2019). On the other hand, these tourists have become key authors of brand stories by sharing brand experiences via social media, connecting consumers and brands (de Vries and Carlson, 2014).

Several pieces of research confirmed that social media marketing activities have had positive direct impact on brand loyalty.

Particularly, Bilgin (2018) pointed out that social media had positive effect on brand awareness, which has expanded the social media significance as awareness reminding tools. Other research revealed that positive destination image enhanced the revisit intention (Assaker et al., 2011). The positive impact of social media on brand loyalty was also discussed by Chahal et al. (2020) who proved that customers' prior social media experience (i.e., convenience when purchasing on SM, exchanging questions about products and services and buying experience on SM) has influenced their social media brand engagement.

Conclusion

Social media has become an essential tool for tourism marketing companies in their marketing efforts to attract a larger number of tourists. These web-based instruments have also provided a large platform for tourists' feedback and have become one of the most significant sources for improvement and innovation ideas. Hence, the research paper explored the positive effects of social media on tourism, having in mind the importance of changes in tourists' purchase intentions and brand loyalty under the influence of the previously mentioned effects.

The study presented a literature analyses for optimizing social media usage in tourism marketing activities. The implication of the results could be beneficial for tourism marketing managers in their efforts to improve tourists' satisfaction and loyalty, thus enlarging profits. In addition, sales were found to increase when a travel agency promoted tourism products through social media that are highly structured, medium-priced, or medium-length, or that require more tourist participation (Chang et al., 2018), which social media made possible. Hence, integrating social media services in tourism marketing activities has been vital in order to attract and retain tourists.

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