INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS - DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION VECTORS IN TOURISM

Mirela MAZILU[1], Cipriana SAVA[2], Sabina GHEORGHECI[3]

[1] *University of Craiova, e-mail: mirelamazilu2004@yahoo.com*

[2] *"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management, Timişoara, e-mail: cipriana.sava@gmail.com*

[3] *University of Craiova, e-mail: sabibi_sabra@yahoo.com*

Abstract

If we were able to choose a head of state with the help of Facebook, why shouldn't we choose the much desired holiday destination as well? In search of new experiences, the Internet is more accessible and, with it, the social networks, especially Facebook! Initially accessed only for us, friends, contacts and communication now Facebook is useful for obtaining information about certain individuals or events, promotion, leisure activities, online transactions.And why not recognize, Facebook is much more accessible than the visit to a travel agency, which, unfortunately, may be insolvent… There are risks, but nothing risked nothing gained was a saying...

Like individuals, the tourism companies must earn over time the trust of the ones to whom they are communicating. The TUI company from Germany has had a Facebook page since 2011, with over 250,000 subscribers. Once on Facebook, you assume risks as well, becoming too transparent, even vulnerable! Not coincidentally the Safer Internet Day was set worldwide on February 9! But there are travel agencies that do not have a Facebook page and they go ahead full steam.

Despite these fears, social networks, especially Facebook, are and will remain options for Internet users related to the choice of a holiday destination. Even the so popular Facebook is losing ground in recent years, due to the emergence of mobile applications on social networks, such as Snapchat, Instagram, Viber, Google+, WhatsApp, etc.

In the knowledge society, Social Media becomes a vector of the tourists' interaction with the online environment, with the preferred brands and means of real-time communication of useful information volume to each individual/tourist. For tourism, social media and communication channels such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube become the most accessed ones mainly by the constant tourists. These social networks, but not only these, have shown the major influence that social media can have when used frequently, intelligently, and when the message resonates with a critical mass of users. The new concepts in Social Media are strategy, planning and integration at the Social Media in Tourism event, held in Bucharest, on 19 February 2016[i].

Introduction:

The Facebook network has over 1.44 billion users and over 830 million members worldwide in 2015. Facebook has become the first social platform and its pages are used to build a community around a tourist destination, offering many opportunities for the trio formed of travel agencies, hosts and tourists, communicating and promoting events with their target audiences.

This autumn, Facebook reached a historic record of 1 billion users in a single day worldwide. At the same time, there are over 8.1 million users (according to statistics of November 2015)

Internet, social media and tourism promotion

In Romania and, with this in mind, we can consider Facebook as a communication channel that can bring us closer to future tourists. (fig.1).Even the National Tourism Authority (NTA) has decided to conclude partnerships with the companies Google, Facebook and Youtube to promote tourism in Romania.
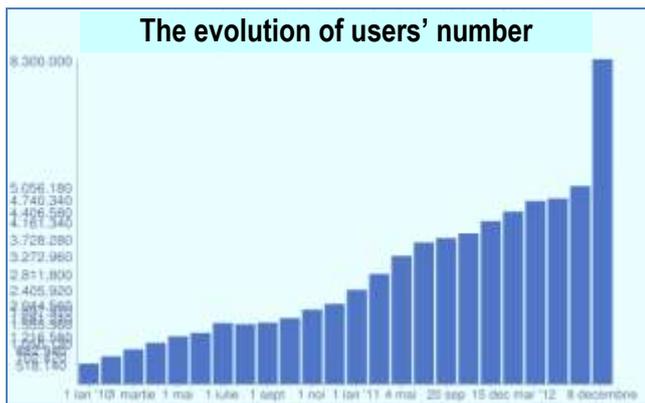
Fig.1.The evolution of Facebook users in Romania
(source: http: //www.facebrands.ro/demografice.html)
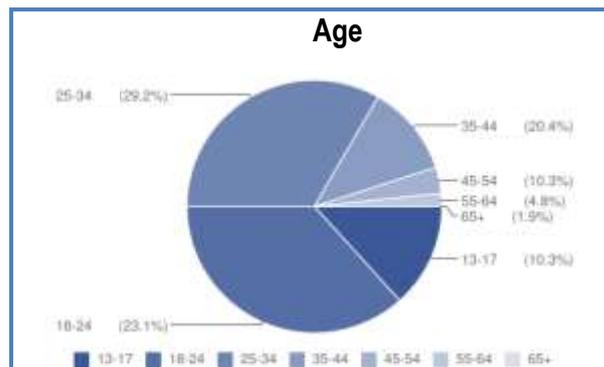

Fig.2 Age structure of Facebook users
Source: http: //www.facebrands.ro/demografice.html

Table 1 Social Media in Romania, in 2015

(Source: http: //www.manafu.ro/2015/11/social-media-in-romania-noiembrie-2015/)

Facebook's growth is impressive in the last 5 years: thus, in November 2015, there were 8.1 million users, compared to October 2014: 7.2 million users, with visible differences between the age groups and populations that access it, the dominating segment being between 25-34 years with a rate of about 30% of those who access Facebook, followed by those between 18-24 years (23.1%), as opposed to the elderly population over 65 years representing only 1.9% (fig.2)

Despite a noticeable slowdown, Facebook continues to be the instrument at hand of the tourism specialists, making it grow, and now even exceeding 800 million members. Everyone fumbles on this type of informational and relational support, but we can identify some trends. One could say that the main objective is to make life easier for tourists and allow them to make the right choice. Overall there have been tools for use in the field of accessing tourist destinations, focusing primarily on:

❖ Giving advice: about the destination, focused on the interests of tourists on leisure activities and events. Ideally, all of the offers should be customized depending on each individual, but Facebook does not actually allow it because setting up a page on a tourism topic, either as a destination or for accommodation or other services, tends to be very difficult to manage in the experts' opinion;

❖ The proposal of innovative and complex or all-inclusive tourist packages related to accommodation, transport, services, although is much less used in Europe, there being even reluctant views on this type of approach.

❖ Attracting supporters, even to participate in animation by offering advice, recommending places or activities, exchanging opinions, feedback after trips, certain memories, photos, updated information, etc.

Unfortunately, many tourist destinations consider their presence on Facebook more advantageous than on a website, forgetting that the information on Facebook is not consumed in the same way, the more that it is a fact that Facebook requires some changes in its policy, it not being a browser, a research tool, but more an updated networking one .Surely, we shall use travel agencies and the advice provided by their consultants, but in 2016 we shall aim mainly at the online tourism and the niche tourism.

A remarkable phenomenon is the promotion of tourism in shaping the tourism blogosphere in Romania - the travel bloggers' community has approx. 270 members, it is a united community, primarily and voluntarily formed of simple aficionados of the tourism phenomenon, even experts in the field, whose tips are an informational source, accessible to the tourist in lack of creativity.

The saying "*if you do not have a website, you do not exist*" transformed into "*if you are not on Facebook, you do not exist!* "

This autumn, Facebook reached a historic record of **1 billion users** in a single day worldwide.

Facebook's growth is impressive in the last 5 years: thus, in November 2015, there were 8.1 million users, compared to October 2014: 7.2 million users. Even if Facebook becomes leaky, knowing our location, the travels or other information related to ourselves, the number of Facebook users is skyrocketing, including its guidelines for the promotion of tourism offers.

Table 2 The situation of internet users (depending on age and occupation) in 2015

The proportion of the persons, aged 16-74, who have accessed the Internet in the last 3 months for various purposes, according to their occupation, in 2015

Purpose of Internet access	Total number of persons, aged 16-74, who have accessed the Internet	-% of the total number of persons, aged 16-74, according to their occupation						
		Occupation						
		employee	employer	freelancer	unemployed	retired	pupil, student	Another inactive person
Participation in social networks	78,3	77,0	78,3	76,7	89,2	48,3	93,7	82,7
To send/receive emails	76,3	78,7	88,0	59,8	77,7	53,8	90,4	64,8
Online reading of news/newspaper/magazine websites	67,2	71,7	83,7	54,8	58,2	69,7	59,5	59,5
Searching for information on health	47,6	51,0	54,1	36,8	33,2	61,9	32,9	56,6
Finding information on goods or services	47,0	51,8	79,0	41,1	42,1	40,5	38,2	37,0
Using the services connected to travelling and/or the assurance of accommodation during travels	23,2	28,7	45,0	9,4	12,7	16,0	18,7	11,6

(multiple answer)

(Source: http: //media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/image-2015-12-21-20681140-0-scopuri2.jpg)

A recent study by the National Authority for Management and Regulation in Communications (ANCOM) shows that 90% of land internet users in Romania use the home Internet to search for information, read news and keep up to date with various events, while 77% of them use it to access social networks. The purposes for which the Internet is used in household can be classified into four categories: information, communication, recreation and electronic transactions.[2]

Conclusions:

The online tourism development is included in optimistic forecasts, taking into account that increasingly more and more Romanians have internet access, the tourism market in Romania being dominated by classic agencies, by developing their own websites. We have recently found that more and more travel agencies have switched from the offline to the online sales system - bringing a growing number of tourists and, thus, implicitly the long-term success, being bound by the law on competition in force for any

market, including the tourism one, to adapt, to innovate in all the 4 components of the mix tourism marketing (promotion, price, product, positioning in the tourism market).

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[i] http://www.turismmarket.com/social-media-summit-2016

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