



INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS - DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION VECTORS IN TOURISM

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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..

Key words:

tourism, internet, social networking, promotion

JEL Codes:

L 83
L 86

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.

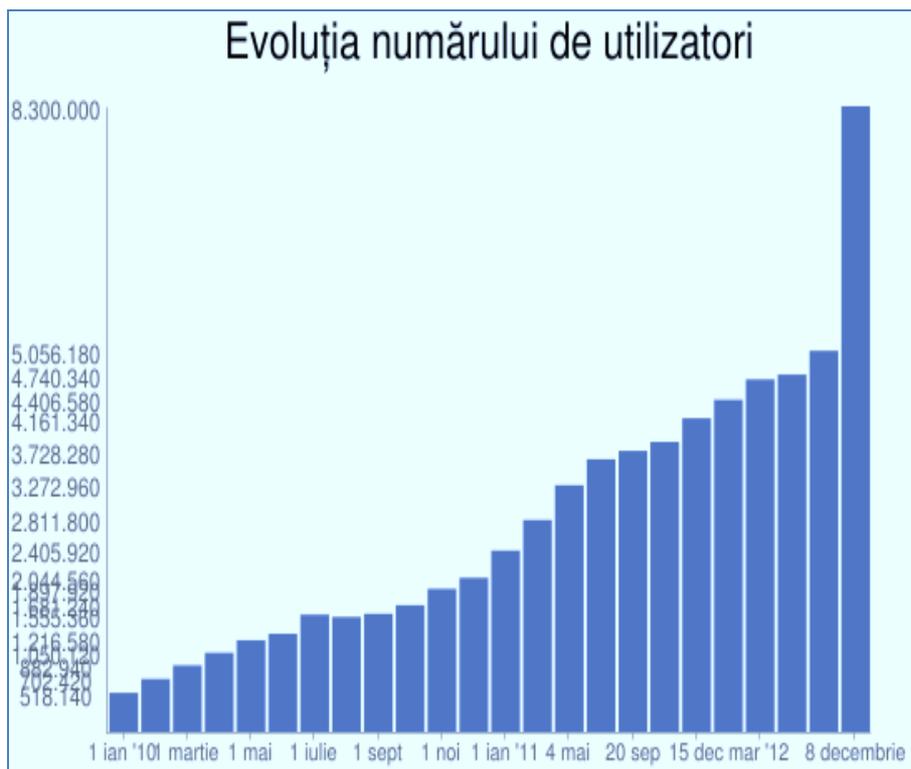


Fig.1. The evolution of Facebook users in Romania (source: <http://www.facebrands.ro/demografice.html>)

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)

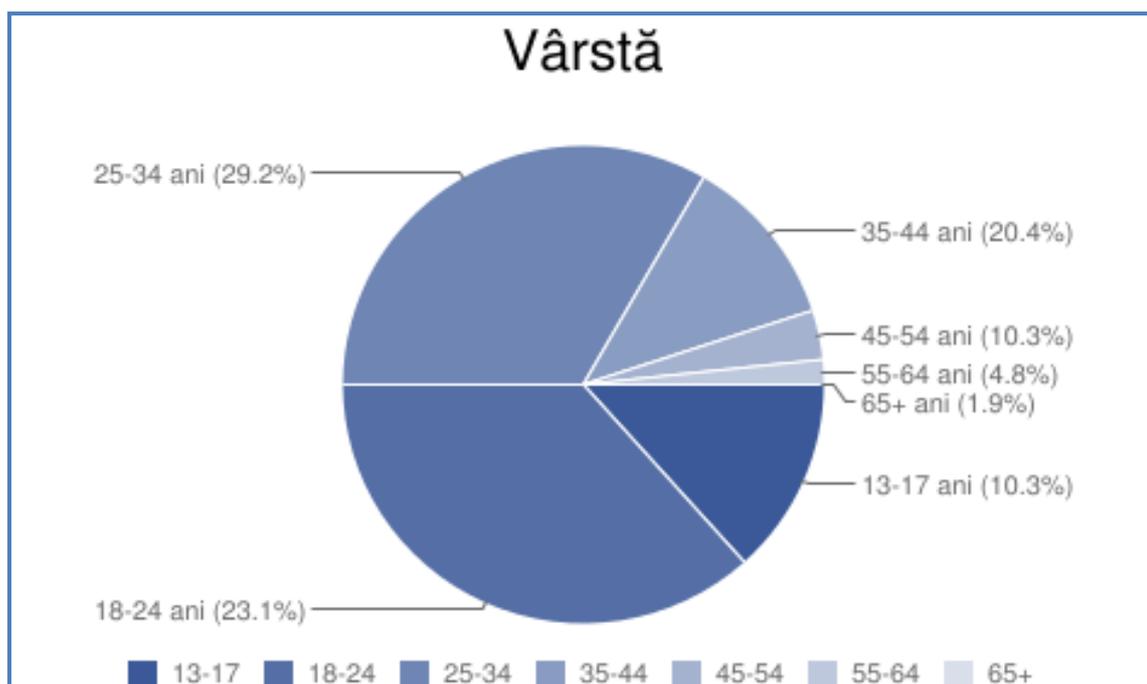


Fig.2 Age structure of Facebook users
 Source: <http://www.facebrands.ro/demografice.html>

Table 1 Social Media in Romania, in 2015

Social Media in Romania (Nov 2015)		
facebook	8,100,000 user accounts <small>FACEBOOK / NOVEMBER 2015</small>	NA
Linked in	1,810,000 user accounts <small>LINKEDIN / NOVEMBER 2015</small>	NA
trilulilu	NA	1,163,961 unique visitors <small>SATI / OCTOBER 2015</small>
	949,601 user accounts <small>TRU.BU / NOVEMBER 2015</small>	2,741,481 unique visitors <small>SATI / OCTOBER 2015</small>
foursquare	94,160 user accounts <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>	812,886 checkins <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>
twitter	379,454 user accounts <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>	28,795 active users <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>
BLOGGING	89,118 blogs <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>	10,738 active blogs <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>
Instagram	362,636 user accounts <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>	219,024 active users <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>
You Tube	824,687 user accounts <small>ZELIST / OCTOBER 2015</small>	7,000,000 unique visitors <small>GOOGLE • MEDIAXFAX / APRIL 2015</small>
skype	NA	2,219,930 free connected users (Windows) <small>THINKDIGITAL / JULY 2015</small>
dailymotion	NA	1,197,706 unique visitors <small>THINKDIGITAL / JULY 2015</small>

NA = Non Available
See each source below the figures

Cristian Manafu / November 2015
www.socialmediatraining.ro

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

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 2015¹

-% of the total number of persons, aged 16-74, according to their occupation

Purpose of Internet access ¹⁾	Total number of persons, aged 16-74, who have accessed the Internet ²⁾	Occupation ³⁾						
		employee ⁴⁾	self-employed ⁵⁾	freelancer ⁶⁾	unemployed ⁷⁾	retired ⁸⁾	pupil, student ⁹⁾	Another inactive person ¹⁰⁾
Participation in social networks ¹⁾	78,3	77,0	78,3	76,7	89,2	48,3	93,7	82,7
To send/receive emails ²⁾	76,3	78,7	88,0	59,8	77,7	53,8	90,4	64,8
Online reading of news/newspaper/magazine websites ³⁾	67,2	71,7	83,7	54,8	58,2	69,7	59,5	59,5
Searching for information on health ⁴⁾	47,6	51,0	54,1	36,8	33,2	61,9	32,9	56,6
Obtaining information about business Finding information on goods or services ⁵⁾	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 ⁶⁾	23,2	28,7	45,0	9,4	12,7	16,0	18,7	11,6

¹⁾ 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.¹

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).

¹ <http://www.iasig.ro/ANCOM-77-dintre-romani-folosesc-internetul-fix-de-acasa-pentru-a-accesa-retelele-de-socializare-articol-3-52132.htm>

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