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**31 May - 2 June, 2018
Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia**

2018

**TOURISM
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation



**THEMATIC
PROCEEDINGS**

I



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



The Third International Scientific Conference

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
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Thematic Proceedings

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Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation

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FOREWORD

The Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja organized the third International Scientific Conference Tourism in function of the development of the Republic of Serbia, Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation that was held in Vrnjačka Banja from May 31st to June 2nd, 2018. For the purpose of this year's Conference, 84 scientific papers were presented by 157 participants coming from USA, Finland, Italy, Romania, Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia.

The Conference is organized in the function of exchanging ideas and experience of the participants coming from Serbia and abroad for the purpose of future tourism development, with the special emphasis given to the impact of modern technologies on tourism and prospects for the development of tourism in Serbia and other countries in the era of digital transformation.

The Thematic Proceedings, as a result of the Conference, are published in two volumes, and will be available to a wider audience, scientifically and practically focused on tourism-related multidisciplinary issues.

Publishing of Thematic Proceedings was financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Vrnjačka Banja,
June, 2018

Editors
Drago Cvijanović, Ph.D.
Arja Lemmetyinen, Ph.D.
Pavlo Ružić, Ph.D.
Cvetko Andreeski, Ph.D.
Dragana Gnjatović, Ph.D.
Tanja Stanišić, Ph.D.
Andrej Mićović, Ph.D.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR THE PROMOTION OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

Cvetanka Ristova¹; Tanja Angelkova Petkova²;

Abstract

Even since the advent of the digital Web 2.0, various researchers have carried out multiple quantitative and qualitative research to understand the ongoing changing of the role of social media and their application in tourism and tourism marketing. It was discussed that the elements of social media will play a major role in the tourism marketing mix in the years to come.

Given that the use of social media continues to grow and develop, a better understanding of the role of social media in the decisions and choices of tourists when visiting a specific tourist destination should be directed towards them, and at the same time they should be approached in a way that the tourist destination can promote its tourism products and services.

Key Words: *promotion, tourism, destination, social media*

JEL classification: *Z3, Z30, Z32*

Introduction

Over the years, the tourists always had the security into leaning on the power of the marketing tool “word of mouth”. This tool has been their friend and family that had inspired and helped them into the planning of their travels and was often led by travel guides, magazines and travel agencies (Mukherjee & Nagabhushanam, 2016).

Still, today with the presence of the digital mediums, the word “word of mouth” had broadened the limits of the selected group through the whole world. The Internet has allowed the tourist facilities to publish more detailed information about their services, including videos (Angelkova

¹Cvetanka Ristova, MSc, Teaching Assistant, University “Goce Delcev”, Stip, Faculty of tourism and business logistics, Gevgelija, Macedonia, cvetanka.ristova@ugd.edu.mk

²Tanja Angelkova Petkova, PhD, Professor, University “Goce Delcev”, Stip, Faculty of tourism and business logistics, Gevgelija, Macedonia, tanja.angelkova@ugd.edu.mk

Petkova-Ristova et al, 2017). Social media is now a part of the digital technology that now is connecting the tourists with their opinions and recommendations with millions of people, including their friends on the social media, and common travelers with similar opinion who they never actually met.

Tourism destinations have taken the advantage of this incredible technology by increasing their promotions of destinations and products in the social media for the sole purpose and its mass. Certain tourism organizations such as Yelp TripAdvisor, Trip Hobo, Travel Triangle and many others provide detailed information on any type of accommodation to small boutiques, restaurants, wholesalers to the destination itself. With more than 200 million reviews and posts, posted until today on TripAdvisor, and more than 800 million Facebook users, where the average user spends at least two hours each day on Facebook (McLeod, 2017), publish and regularly update images and videos from a certain tourist destination, we see the social media as a dominant tool in the tourism scenario.

Tourism and social media

Social media has a major impact on all the spheres of our lives. We often rely on social networks to find out new tourist destinations and plan our trips. We share our travel experiences and special moments, our opinions about hotels, restaurants, airlines or rental services. By expressing our opinion, we affect the decisions of our peers in planning their future trips.

With this, we are confirming that social media play a major role in tourism, especially in the decision-making process and by creating marketing campaigns and communicating with consumers. Therefore, the impact of social media in tourism industry has been greatly magnified to push the mobilization of tourists to consider the information in social media as their reference for travelling (Fananti & Suyadnya, 2015). Due to growth in the trend, many travel companies are incorporating social media applications into their marketing strategy (Parsons, 2017). Also, the tourism is particularly dependent on the verbal message – such as opinions, recommendations and comments on social platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, which in fact allow its users to share suggestions and tips (Kazak, 2016).

We should see the social media as an extended “word of mouth” ad taken to a next level. Because, social media plays a major role in disrupting traditional business models and is allowing creators of content to connect directly with their audience (Madondo, 2016). The attractions, hotels, transportation, restaurants in the destination can use the social media as a personalized form of advertising. The use of the social media can help them to enhance the buzz and create credibility at a low or no cost at all.

It cannot be denied that social media platforms are a powerful tool and their impact on tourism will increase. Not accepting and appropriating their ever-growing influence on the tourism industry and continuing to use already consumed marketing methods will lead to a negative impact on the business.

The most commonly used social media platforms for tourism marketing are: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google, Google Street View, Instagram, Flickr, Tencent, Weibo, Sina Weibo, Foursquare, Yelp, Android applications and Smartphone applications (Mukherjee & Nagabhushanam, 2016).

Social media as a tool for tourism marketing

One of the basic functions of the marketing is expressed through its influences on shaping images, concept, image among buyers, respectively consumers, about the destination itself (Dimitrov & Angelkova, Petkova, 2014). Therefore, social media as a concept consists of: various forums, blogs, chats, emails, company websites, photos, videos, social networking sites and other online platforms. They can be interpreted as a way to experiment with the new opportunities that can help to improve and create new forms of customer value, which is very important when it comes to attracting new customers (Kuric, 2016). The Internet is changing, from a world of information into a world of influence, and its elements are social media that are already beginning to revolutionize the state of marketing, advertising and promotions.

What makes social media an attractive and useful tool in every area of our lives, including tourism? The Internet has become a medium, created for communication, but sponsored by consumers. It is now the first source of media for consumers at work and a second source of media at home. Consumers are constantly demanding more control over the media content they need, including the current access to information and setting

up concessional types of ads, such as radio, magazines, and so on. Other, many types of social media provide consumers with unlimited opportunities for their information, by offering them a search into their base, which will eventually influence the buying decision. Social media is recognized by consumers as a true source of information about products or services aside from old commercial communications based on the classic elements of the promotional mix. Destinations marketers can use social media before the travel (to inspire, inform, engage), during the travel (to facilitate at destination) and after the holiday (to remember, share and engage) (Popesku, 2014).

Promotion of the tourist destination through the social media

Social media is an online application tool that allows the user to earn money and collaborate online. People with a common interest can gather to share their thoughts, comments and opinions. Social media enables companies to advertise and promote their products with better opportunities. The advertiser can create his own website, with interesting content and doesn't have to pay a huge amount of money for publication and distribution (Hasan, 2015).

Thus, with the promotion through social media, we've already confirmed the influence on the decision to purchase products and services, or in the case of destination marketing, to choose the particular destination. The importance of social media promotion lies in having high potential to generate different benefits: increase interest in the destination, show the benefits of a particular destination, differentiate the destination, create a picture of the destination, and can also motivate tourists to stay longer at the destination.

With this, today's travel companies are increasingly active through social media, especially international ones. Social networks are one of the fastest and most effective ways to communicate and spread the information with a large group (Hasan, 2015).

Speaking about social media and their benefits in promoting the tourist destination, in 2009, a Colorado social media campaign was called "Snow at a Glance" in order to raise awareness of Colorado as a winter sports destination. The campaign was aimed at selecting three people who never experienced snow through a contest. Potential participants were asked to submit a one-minute video at www.snowatsight.com and explain why

they should receive the award. Participants were supposed to use their social media such as Facebook and Twitter to spread the word about their entry, and also to write about their experiences, to photograph and share videos on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. The award included experience in the Colorado winter season from January to March, 2010: skiing, snowboarding, skiing, nightlife activities and spa. The media coverage of the campaign was worth 2.9 million dollars for advertising, but it generated 300 million people by impressions of the media and creating an impression of Colorado as a winter destination.

Visit Japan 2010 has a Facebook page that gathers all the information about travel that you ever need if you decide to travel to Japan. The look is clean and the information is well organized. Their Facebook feedback is showing that their visitors check the page first, and later Google. The page is regularly updated, and it offers a question box and the chance to post your experience of the page while in Japan (Chong, 2010).

Another example is New Zealand who has a YouTube channel that beside the great videos, it helps the tourists to plan their holidays through a slogan. The channel gives you information about New Zealand, how to get to there, where to stay and eat, and many more (Chong, 2010).

What we can confirm is that with the promotion through social media, the tourist destination remains a competitor in the market.

More satisfied tourists from the tourist destinations with the use of the social media

It is vital that tourist destinations keep their tourists well - informed in order to create value for the tourist. Social media supports this logic of value by allowing travel companies to have a personal relationship with the needs and offerings that are being developed (Ranjha, 2010). With that, travel companies aim to listen to the wishes of the tourists and design it offers according to the needs of consumers as well as to inform tourists about their latest offers.

Social media provides a realistic picture of the tourist destination by eliminating the dramatically created image. The traditional media can build a highly desired value by combining exotic and luxury experience in a tourist destination. This would obviously lead to exclusion when the desired experiences were compared with the already experienced

attributes in the destination, and therefore would result in a feeling of low satisfaction. On the other hand, individuals in social media receive information from the experiences and advice of other individuals who develop their desired value based on reality. When the desired value of the tourist is similar or greater than the value obtained, then the tourist will have a high sense of satisfaction in entirety.

Methodology and research framework

By discussing and analyzing this subject by authors at the classes Tourist Destination on the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Gevgelija, a survey was conducted on students in order to determine the influence of social media in the Millennials in the choice of a tourist destination.

The survey was conducted online and it was sent to their students' emails accounts. A total of 100 students from the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Gevgelija participate in the survey.

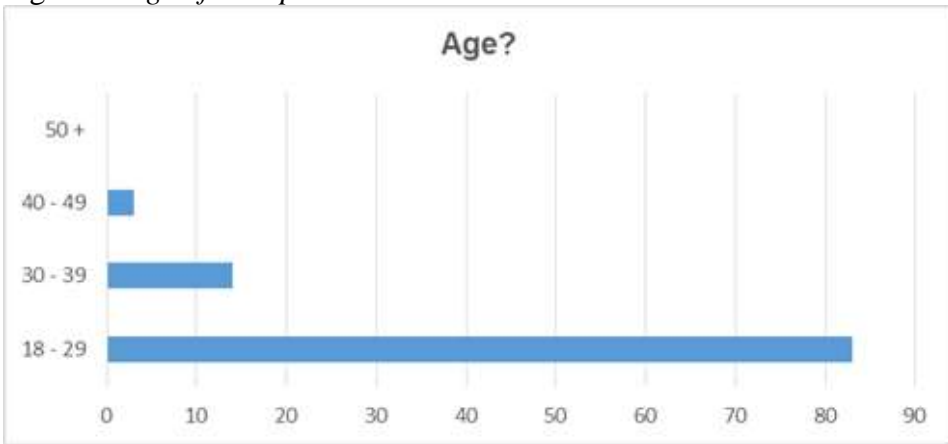
Processing and analysis of the statistical data

Figure 1: *Gender of a respondent*



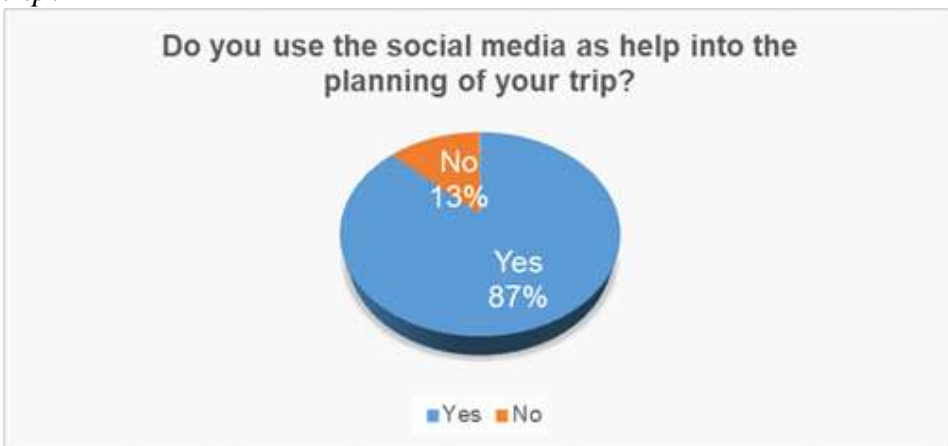
A total of 100 students from the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics participated in the survey, out of which 56 examinees were female, and 44 were male.

Figure 2: Age of a respondent



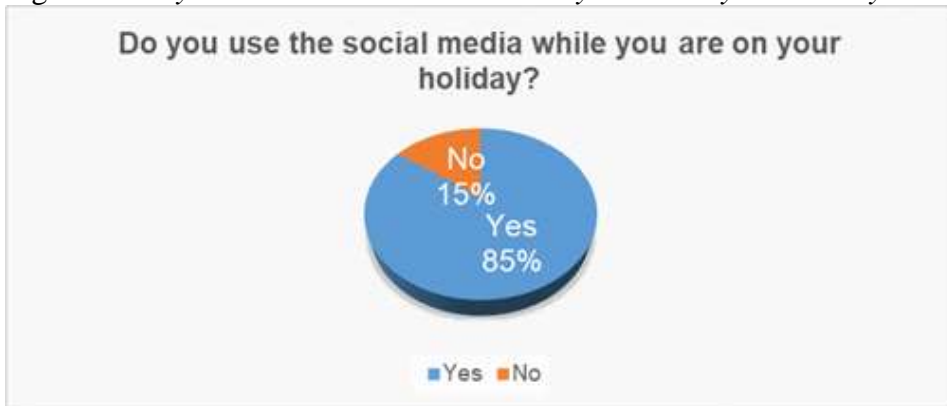
In the survey, the majority of students who participated were aged 18-29 years (83 examinees), the participation of the respondents from 30 to 39 years was (14 examinees) and respondents from 40 to 49 years (3 examinees) were observed. The respondents from 50+ were not interviewed.

Figure 3: Do you use the social media as help into the planning of your trip?



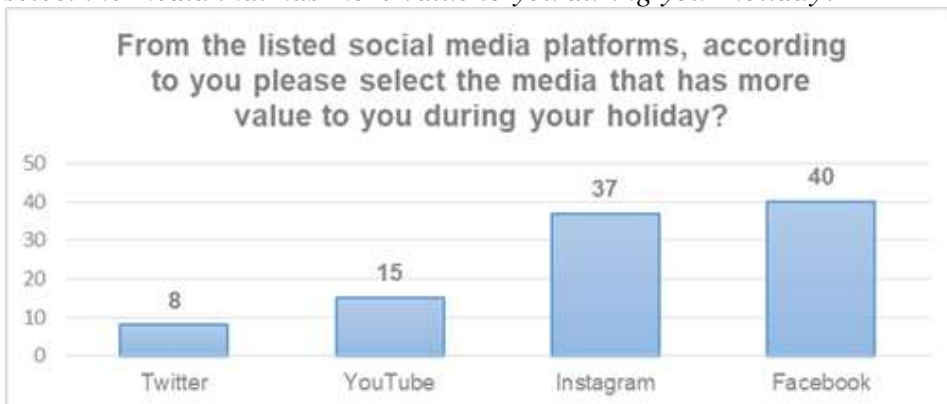
A total of 87 students at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, responded that they use the social media as a tool for planning their journey, compared to only 13 of them who answered that they do not use social media as a help in planning a tourist travel.

Figure 4: *Do you use the social media while you are on your holiday?*



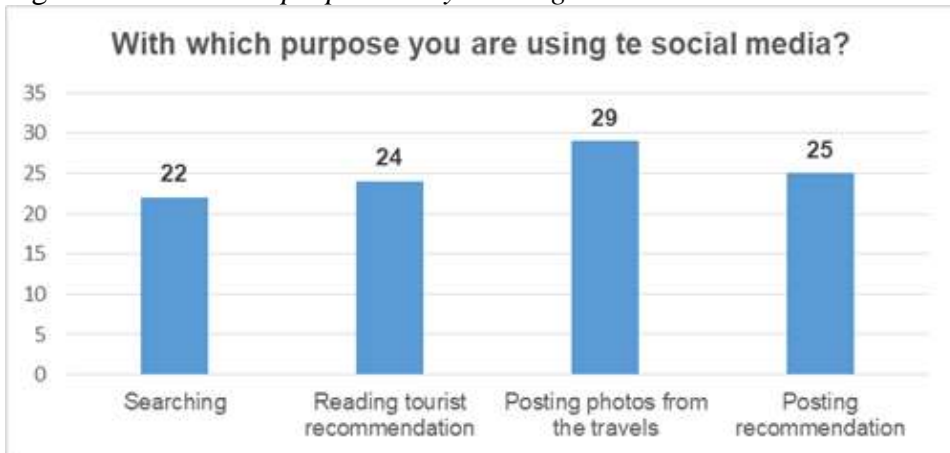
Apart from the use of social media into planning their holiday, the next question was asked whether students use social media during the holiday itself. Out of a total of 87 examinees who use social media in planning, 85 of them are using social media during the holiday itself. That is, 3 respondents answered that they initially use them during the planning, but during the holiday they do not prefer to use them. Thus, a total of 15 responses were recorded from examinees who do not use social media during the holiday at all.

Figure 5: *From the listed social media platforms, according to you please select the media that has more value to you during your holiday?*



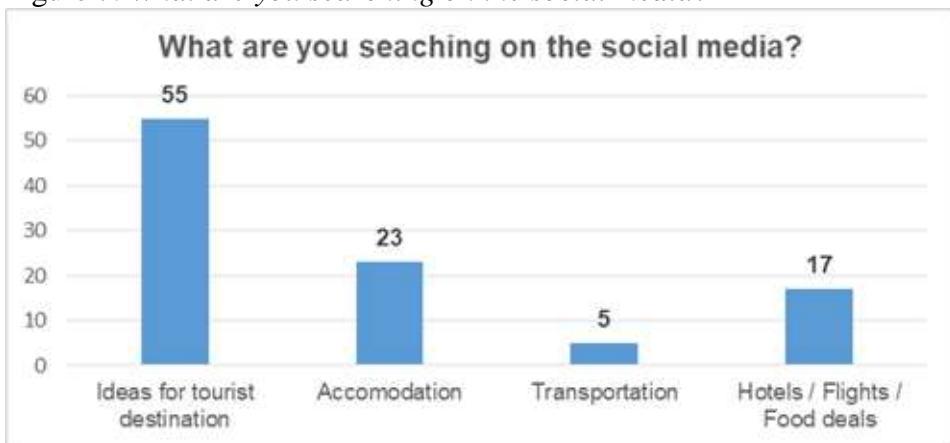
Facebook (40 examinees) and Instagram (37 examinees) are the most used social media platforms among students at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics into the planning of their holiday. A lower rate of use among students noted platforms like YouTube (15 examinees) and Twitter (8 examinees).

Figure 6: *With which purpose are you using the social media?*



By this question, we can conclude that all of the above is important to the students. Posting photos from the travels (29 examinees) is the most used activity by the students while they are online, followed by the posting of recommendations (25 examinees) and reading tourist recommendations (24 examinees) and the least used activity is searching information (22 examinees).

Figure 7: *What are you seaching on the social media?*



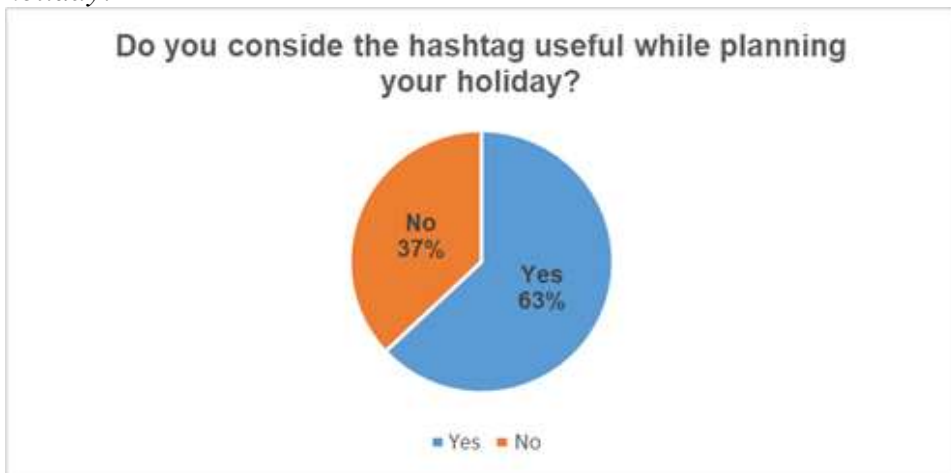
The idea of a tourist destination (55 examinees) is most sought after by students from the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in the use of social media, followed by the search for accommodation (23 examinees) and hotels / flights / food deals (17 examinees). The students answered that the least search data is for transport choices (5 examinees).

Figure 8: *Do photos of the tourist destination, encourage you to travel?*



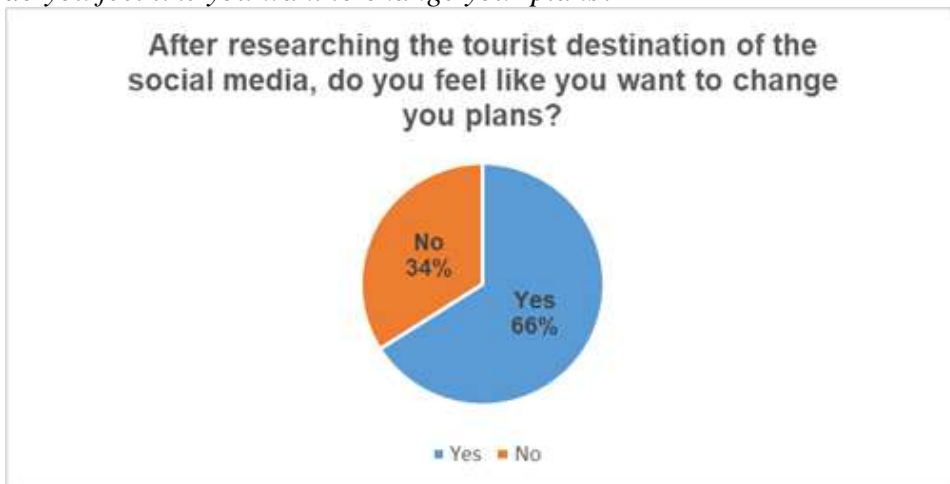
A unanimous answer from all students (100 examinees) that the photos from a particular tourist destination encourage them to visit it.

Figure 9: *Do you consider the hashtag useful while planning your holiday?*



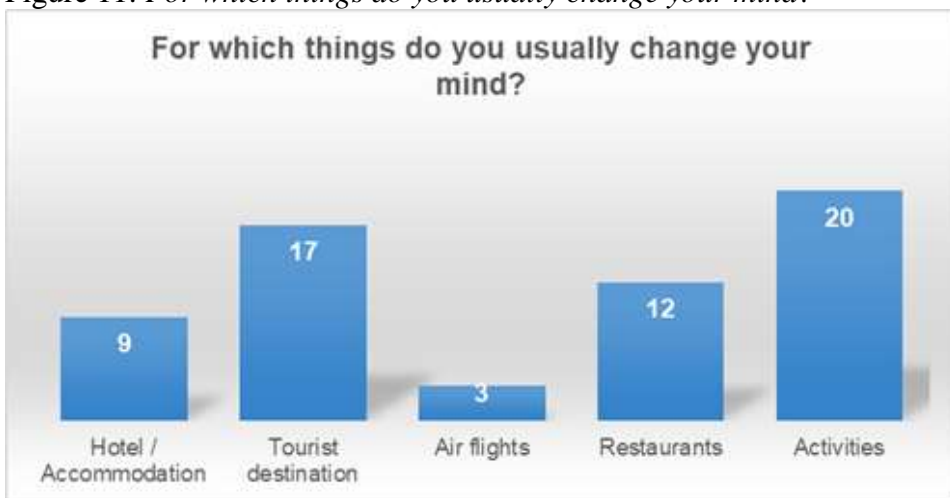
The hashtag from 63 examinees is used in the process of selecting a tourist destination, while for 37 examinees it has no value.

Figure 10: *After researching the tourist destination of the social media, do you feel like you want to change your plans?*



66 examinees answered that after searching the tourist destination of social media, they are going to change their plans, while for another 34 examinees the search for a destination on social media has no effect after in the change of travel plans.

Figure 11: *For which things do you usually change your mind?*



Only the students, who responded affirmatively to the previous question, also answered this question. In particular, 66 students with the search for the destination of social media often change their plans when it comes to activities (20 examinees), then the choice of the destination (17

examinees), the choice of restaurant (12 examinees) and hotels / accommodation / deals for food (9 examinees). Only 3 examinees answered that after searching for a tourist destination on social networks, they decided to change the choice of air companies.

Figure 12: *Choose the form of advertising that you trust the most*

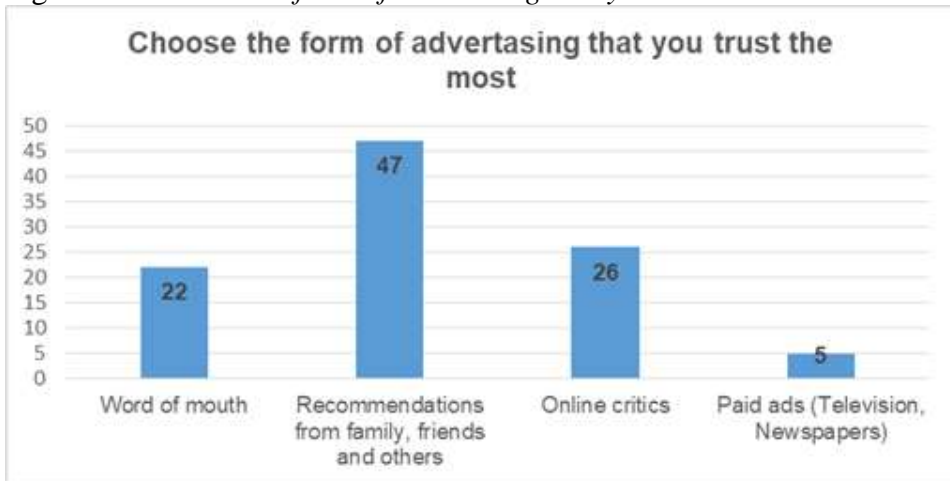
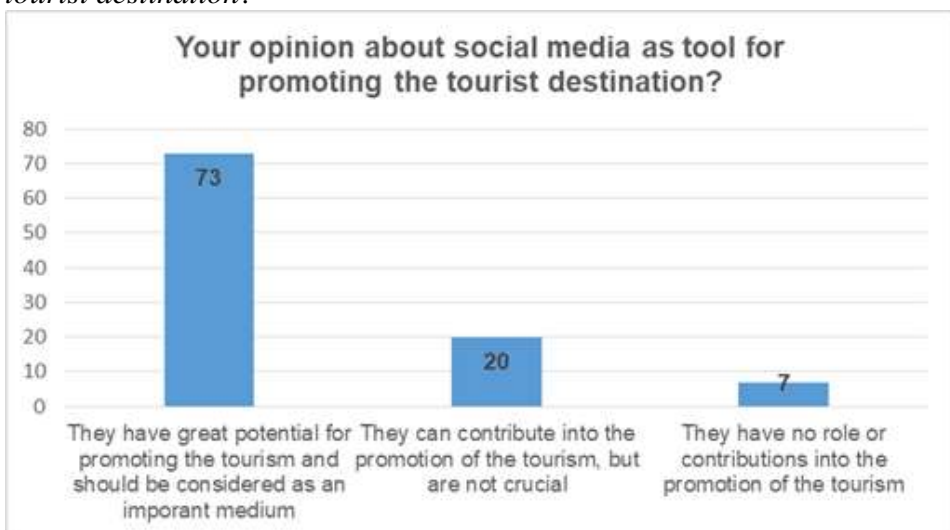


Figure 13: *Your opinion about social media as a tool for promoting the tourist destination?*



By choosing the form of advertising, according to importance, the students responded that the recommendations of their family, friends, colleagues, etc. (47 examinees) are most important to them, 26 examinees

believe the online critics, while 22 examinees believe in "word of mouth" and only 5 examinees believe in paid ads.

More than 50% of the students responded (73 examinees) believe in the potential of social media and the importance of them as a medium in tourism. 20 examinees answered that they believe in their contribution to the promotion of tourist destinations, but that they are not crucial and 7 examinees answered that social media, according to them do not have an important role or contribution to the promotion of the tourist destination.

Findings and discussion of research results

It is clear to us that in a very short time, the social media has grown into one of the most exploited media in the need for planning a tourist trip (Petrevska, 2014). Its successful dominance is thanks to the support of tourism organizations and companies that have embraced it as the dominant market for the transfer of tourist information to all travelers and tourists.

Since the advent of technology and social media, the planning for the holidays has become is very different than it used to be. The tourists no longer rely on guidebooks compiled by "experts" with out-of-date information or even paper maps to navigate their latest destination. Instead of that, nowadays the tourists have the privilege of enormous and constant access to information across the web in the form of TripAdvisor, Trip Hobo, Travel Triangle reviews and travelers' Pinterest or Instagram photos depicting their latest vacation. This real-time access to relevant tips and, often, crowd-sourced information, has ultimately changed the way travelers approach planning a holidays – from inspiration to booking. Because of this significance, a survey was conducted that explains and shows how much influence the social media have when choosing a tourist destination and planning a trip.

The surveyed were students at the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Gevgelija, where the survey was sent through the student's email, and although as a target group where the Millennials, the survey also interviewed adult students. A total of 100 students answered the survey. The Millennials recorded the most responses, 83 examinees, but also there were 14 students from the age of 30 to 39 and 3 students from the of 40 to 49. 87% of the students use social media as an auxiliary tool for planning a tourist trip, and 85% use them again during the trip to the

tourist destination. Facebook and Instagram are the most used social platforms, mostly for posting pictures of the tourist destination and travel, but also as a help for choosing a tourist destination. A positive answer was received from all students, that a couple of pictures posted online from the tourist destination on one of the social media are enough to encourage them to visit it. But, that 66% of them when searching for a tourist destination on social networks, later decide to change their plans, which most often refers to the activities at the destination itself or even the place to visit. However, when it comes to choosing a tourist destination, students have their faith in their family, friends, colleagues, etc. The last form of advertising that they believe are paid advertisements. 73 students responded that they consider social media as an important element in promoting the tourist destination, while 20 students emphasized their importance in promoting the destination, but stated that the decision was not decisive. Only 7 students stressed that social media have no share in them and in general in promoting the tourist destination.

The survey gives us insights that the Millennials really rely on social media in choosing a tourist destination, and that the tourism destination should enable even more involved elements available on social platforms (hotels, restaurants, rent-a-car companies, tourist agencies) that will be easy to search by millennials - tourists just through the hashtag. Even encourage the use of a branded hashtag, where experiences can increasingly get more prestige over items. The Millennials are aiming more towards a desirable experience over a desirable item. Meaning, while posting and sharing photos and videos online, to capitalize this, the destination should encourage them by using a branded hashtag.

The very elements of the tourist destination should know that today, for a tourist, it is enough with a single click to reduce the reputation of the destination. With the constant posting of images, videos, reviews the attractiveness of the destination will increase, but also, it will inspire the tourists among themselves during the trip. With real time photos of the attended events, the tourists will get inspired to attend too, even if they have not planned their trip before.

Although the students responded that they still have greater faith in recommending a tourist destination than their family and friends, this does not mean that it should be viewed negatively on social media. It is this recommendation from a family, friends or colleagues that may be valid because they have posted a photo or video from a visit to the

destination. This induces that the elements in the tourist destination should insist on tourists to post pictures, announcements, videos, etc. while visiting the destination via hashtag and location.

Conclusion

The use of the Internet and other information communication technologies has led to a new era of tourism industry. Social media, as one of the most powerful networking tools, are nowadays integrated into the social and economic life of any individual. And that is why the tourists, no longer decide on a destination, research what to do or where to stay, and then purchase the required tickets. Instead, their path to travel, both purchase and experience, has become nonlinear. They decided to turn to their friends, coworkers, and influencers within the expanding social media world to find the travel and vacation inspiration, and even deals to support their newly discovered destination.

Tourist destinations should use the social media before the travel (to inspire, inform, engage), during the travel (to facilitate at destination) and after the holiday (to remember, share and engage). Non-acceptance of the use of social media in the promotion of the tourist destination will cause a decrease in their competitive advantage. Because so far, that the importance of promoting the symbolic aspects of the destination rather than solely promoting the functional attributes such as price and weather; the tourist destination need to consider the anticipated social media buzz travel will create and harness the force behind these symbolic images to influence visitation to the destination.

But what is the cost of using social media, which are now one of the most popular media than any other? The answer is simple. Social networks are free. Today, everyone is present on social media and around 80% of the world's population uses a different kind of social platform. Of course, for increasing business in a particular tourist destination, but also in general, various paid promotions can be used, but are far cheaper and more accessible to everyone than other media. Social media is one of the easiest forms for promotion. Because someone (a potential tourist) can easily neglect your paid ad for the particular tourist destination, but a social media ad and a link of recommendations, reviews, and comments can easily make the individuals follow their friend's footsteps, and choose to experience this incredible adventure. With this availability, and the role of

a hashtag, it's much easier for hotels, restaurants to find loyal guests, and reward them accordingly.

What I believe that is the key answer to how social media can boost the promotion of tourism promotion of the destination itself is the larger target group. The tourist destination of social media is available for promotion 24 hours per day, and every user who observes on social media is a potential tourist.

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