

SOCIAL NETWORKS IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Social networks are widely used in areas such as marketing and communication, among the first industries to which was observed development of business being the tourism. In this industry, social networks can have a significant impact on the decisions taken by tourists concerning the destination. More than half of potential tourists and not just in our country are planning their vacations asking the opinion of other users on social networks. The huge increase of social networking user accounts in Romania (9.6 million at the beginning of 2017) created a potential to be used more efficiently by everyone in the hospitality industry to improve their reputation and customer loyalty.

Keywords: social networking, tourism, hospitality industry

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the vast majority of consumers express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding a product or service in the space offered by the social media, thereby forcing companies to communicate relevant and timely on these channels.

In the tourism industry, social networks can have a major impact on decisions about the destination. According to studies, 60% of potential tourists from around the world are asking for feedback from social networks when planning their holidays. Basically, the increasing from year to year of the number of social media users, moved the marketing in the online area, its potential must be used as efficiently as possible by all players in the hospitality industry who want the loyalty of customers and to become an interesting destination for new tourists. [7]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the study, data were taken from various sites of national and international statistics, concerning the number of Internet users and respectively social networking. Of these some data were selected and sorted according to areas, periods and fields of interest for this study. Also there have been taken into account various opinions of some experts, concerning the aid provided by the use of social media in the tourism and hospitality industry.

RESEARCH RESULTS

To achieve the best results on the market, a company must know its needs and objectives, develop and monitor their communication style and used methods. Romania is not among the countries with a very high percentage of Internet access compared to other EU countries, the percentage reached in 2015 being approximately 55%, after neighbors from Bulgaria (56.6%) and Hungary (72.8%) and away from other countries such as France (84.7%), Germany (87.6%) and the UK (92%). This does not mean that this area does should not be considered, especially since the number of Romanian Facebook users, to name just one network, exceeded 9.6 million in the 2017. At the same time it increased the number of Romanian Facebook pages from 32489 pages in early 2016 to 40102 in early January 2017 (a difference of almost 19%) [2]. According to statistics, the number of users of Facebook in Romania has doubled in the last 5 years and the number of pages

almost tripled (Figure 1). Of these, most are found in Transylvania, followed by those in Muntenia, Bucharest and Moldova, all with percentages over 10% of the total. In the middle we have Oltenia, Banat, Dobrogea and Crisana, with values between 4 and 8%, the latter being Bucovina and Maramures, with percentages up to 4% (table 1).

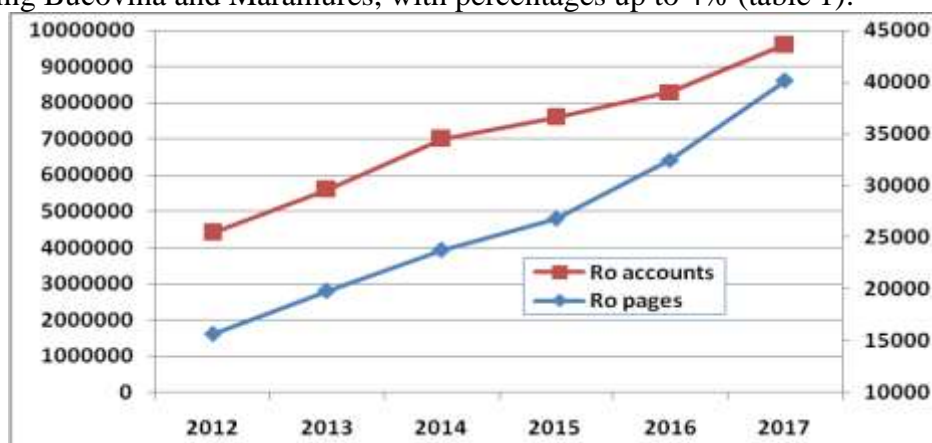


Figure 1. The evolution of Romanian Facebook accounts and pages, 2012-2017

Source: Processing after <http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/ro.htm>, 22.01.2017

Table 1.

Facebook users in Romania, by region

Region	Percent
Transylvania	19,67
Muntenia	18,24
Bucuresti	18,12
Moldova	13,56
Oltenia	7,89
Banat	5,73
Dobrogea	4,78
Crişana	4,61
Bucovina	3,99
Maramureş	3,40

Source: <http://www.facebrands.ro> [2]

In this paper we referred mainly to Facebook because today is the most used social network, with over 55% of users, the following places (as main networks used in Romania) being occupied by LinkedIn Twitter and Google+, 14, 11 and 9% respectively (Table 2).

Table 2.

Percent of People Who Use Social Networks

Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Google+
56%	14%	11%	9%

Source: <http://www.facebrands.ro>

The idea of advertising through social networks has two components, one on what is presented on company page and the second on what presents visitors pages. The first component is important because it is a business card and a bidirectional online communication direct with the owner of the page. The second is sometimes even more important because it is more credible to potential tourist, especially when coming from a known person and these images and comments are taken directly from that person by being there and not from the company page. Therefore it is recommended that the company may not offer in the pages information that are not checked in reality, because they may entail

negative comments. However, it would be good to have a person or a team to especially handle the posts and communication through social media, to display permanent new data, new information and to promptly respond to various requests from visitors. According to some studies [6] worldwide, about 78% of companies have such a team and over 60% of small businesses said they have gained new customers through social networking pages.

What is the situation of social sites in Romania, if we look at the area in which it posting. At the beginning of 2017, most Romanian Facebook pages were from the following categories: Local Businesses (4331), Health & Personal Care (2792) Online Stores (2482), Art and Culture (2157), Singer and band (1671), Blogs (1581), communities (1529) Education (1440), businesses and companies (1376) Entertainment (1178) [3].



Figure 2. Facebook tops of hits in Romania, sections Tourism & holidays and General Rankings

Source: Processing after <http://www.facebrands.ro/category/65/Turism-vacante.html>, 20.02.2017

In the overall ranking of the most visited pages, the first six places are occupied by singers or bands, and in the top four vacations category in the first 10 places prevailed those that are offering visiting destinations and images from there (figure 2). Interestingly, the number 9 as page hits is the Hungarian travel agency social network page. Our hope was to find here at least a hostel or resort which is independently present and not included in a group presentation, but it's just as well. Areas such as the Danube Delta, Bucovina and Maramures, where according to statistics there are few Facebook users, appear quite low in charts hits, even if are distinguished by beauty, tranquility, or special facilities for food and lodging. Bucovina for example is in places 15, 23 and 24, with a number of fans between about 50000 and 150000. Danube Delta ranks No. 141 with a guest house on 139th place and Maramures is in 112th place in the category of Arts and Culture and 213th place in and Tourism and holidays, with just over 10000 fans. Currently in the world there are over 1.8 billion Facebook users only, posting every minute over 500000 comments and over 130000 pictures. It is clear that we will not attract even the one thousandth of them on our

pages, but from 10,000 to over 5.5 million page as is Visiting Dubai is an enormous difference [5].

CONCLUSIONS

Social networks have a huge impact on any industry throughout the world and especially on the tourism and hospitality. These have come to heavily depend on social platforms where different opinions and recommendations spread and that can be very valuable to the business, especially when they are positive. Should not be overlooked negative remarks like "pity that does not ...", which is actually an incentive to achieve something that will be successful in the future.

Over 90% of consumers have more trust in recommendations from friends or family members who have lived and shared their experiences, than in any other form of advertising. Also, over 50% of tourists have changed their travel plans after making various researches through social media. Currently, when most people use smartphones or tablets in and for domestic and foreign trips, when one of two people in Romania is a social networks user, photos and impressions from their friends holiday inspire them choosing their own holidays. Social media networks are modifying the existing relations in the triad provider of products or services, product or service and consumer. The last one as a result of his experience, is no longer a simple spectator but rather a partner in generating products and/or services.

Even if the main domain of social networks is in marketing and communications, real sale of products and services appears especially in the tourism and hospitality industry. They have noted increases in sales and customer loyalty, all due to the presence in social media and connecting to opinions of consumers. It was also noted that the vast majority of small businesses, with fewer than 50 employees, are present in online social media, which is a good thing, increasing awareness and market presence are among the most important assets they enjoy, because they are usually having no large funds for the advertising.

Unfortunately, in Romania there are beautiful areas that have not yet the online support offered by social networks. Romania is not only Black Sea and mountain resorts. Many tourists might be interested in the cultural, religious, spa, elements that occur sporadically and not on dedicated social media sites, so their chance is just what appears on visitor page. The famous phrase "You're not on Facebook so you do not exist" clearly applies to tourism and hospitality industry.

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