

The use of social media as a tool for acquiring knowledge and collaborative environment in Tourism - The Case of Greece

DIMITRIOS BELIAS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Larissa,
Greece

EFSTATHIOS VELISSARIOU

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Larissa,
Greece

DIMITRIOS KYRIAKOU

Dept. of Economic Sciences, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

LABROS VASILIAS

Dept. of Accounting and Finance, T.E.I of Central Greece

LABROS SDROLIAS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Larissa,
Greece

GEORGE ASPRIDIS

Department of Business Administration, Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly, Larissa,
Greece

ATHANASIOS KOUSTELIOS

Dept of Physical Education and Sport Science, University of Thessaly, Greece

ABSTRACT

Social media are not only a very effective communication tool, but also is a tool for knowledge management and promote a collaborative environment, particularly with customers (Shan et al, 2011). Surveys have shown that social media have enough information and are a reliable tool for information about tourist destinations and one in three that this information is sufficient to evaluate a tourist destination. Thus, although the attitude of tourists across social media are positive, but it seems that there is a gap in the issue of adequate and reliable information about tourist destinations in social media (Munar et al, 2013). Of course, it should be mentioned that social media can be a source of important knowledge. For example, a complaint from a customer can show that there is indeed a problem somewhere and get into the tourism business in the process to terminate. This shows that it can and tourists to become a part of management and give value to the business (Leung et al, 2013). In this case it must be noted that it is a very interesting area that certainly deserves more scientific research, particularly in regarding the Greece. Can the majority of professionals in the tourism industry to think of social media as a means of communication, but the reality is that it can become a knowledge acquisition and management tool as collaborative solutions.

Keywords: Social Media 1, Knowledge Acquisition 2, Tourism 3, Greece 4, Collaboration 5

JEL Classification: L83, L84, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media and the subsequent changes in user behavior, create a new reality for the tourist business which should be adjusted promptly and efficiently, both to take advantage of emerging marketing opportunities and on the other to survive in an environment intense competition, as tourism. The study therefore the problem is particularly important and much more for Greece, where the economic crisis threatened the viability of tourism businesses while simultaneously sought economic and efficient ways to display and promote their products. In this context, the facility services with the largest contribution of 45.3%, resulting in tourist GDP of the country from tourism expenditure (IOBE, 2012) and the adoption of social media as tools of marketing, exhibit increased research interest.

This paper will concentrate on the case of the use of social media as a tool which will contribute on acquiring new knowledge and a collaborative environment where the tourist companies will use the social media as a mean to acquire such knowledge from its own customers. For example, when a customer writes a review or a complain, this is not always something negative. In this way the social media will have a useful role not only as a communication tool but also as a tool to collect and acquire new knowledge and collaborate with the clients. The objects that have specifically investigated so far, according to the literature, mainly on the impact of social media, the travel planning (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Ye et al., 2011) and in shaping perceptions (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012) and customer loyalty (Sparks and Browning, 2011). However, there is a need to further investigate the case of how

social media can be a mean to collect new knowledge and to collaborate with the customers on this, since there is a lack of related literature, something that gives value on this.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a literature review which will examine the value of information and data management for a tourist company. Hence the methodology of this paper relies on the use of already made researches and papers; this is a literature review. The source of papers has being from various databases such as science direct and ESCBO. The paper will introduce the concept the use of social media as a tool for acquiring knowledge and collaborative environment in Greek tourism. The value of this paper is that it will connect the concept of Knowledge with the concept of tourism and how it is applied on the tourist sector.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TOURISM MARKET

The Internet is a very important tool for travel planning from potential visitors tourist destinations around the world. Consumers are increasingly using the Internet to gather information about their upcoming trips (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) and further bookings and purchase of all or part of the tourism product made to a very large extent via the Internet. As stated in the European Travel Commission report for 2010, 64% of travelers for pleasure and 65% of travelers for business purposes, used the Internet to plan their trips, including booking airline tickets and accommodation in hotels.

The collection of information for the tourist product until recently limited to the official websites of tourism enterprises and any other body or organization that displays a tourist destination. The emergence of social media on the Internet, included in the so-called Web 2.0, allows more consumers to exchange with each other all kinds of information about trips they have made (Chan and Denizci Guillet, 2011), which in addition informative acquire and advisory value. It is a fact that more and more consumers are seeking information on products / services in the various social media and less on traditional media of television, radio, magazines etc. (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). According to a survey of Insites Consulting conducted in 2012 in 19 countries, six out of ten Internet users visited at least once a day a social networking site and 50% of post information about products, brands and companies.

The feature that attaches great value to the social media of the Internet is that users create themselves their content (Jin, 2012; Leung et al., 2013) as opposed to traditional media, where consumer is a passive message receiver (Bruhn et al, 2012). As characteristic point, Leung et al. (2013) state that the social media have been widely adopted by consumers to search and organize their travel, and for sharing and commenting on their travel experience through weblogs (blogs) and microblogs, such as Blogger and Twitter, to online communities such as Facebook and TripAdvisor, content sharing sites like Flickr and YouTube and many other collaborative tools character.

The participation of users in the production of the content of the media, revealed a new form of word of communication mouth, e-word of mouth that is changing the relationship between business and customer in every corner of the globe (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Consumers as users of social media can now when making purchasing decisions or choosing a product, seek advice from older buyers (Sparks and Browning, 2011), where only friends are not included, relatives and their other close persons but people from different parts of the world, unknown to each other (Pan et al 2007). As a consequence of these developments, it can be considered to increase the bargaining power of the consumer, as he now has access to more impartial and transparent information, which comes from other consumers and not by companies.

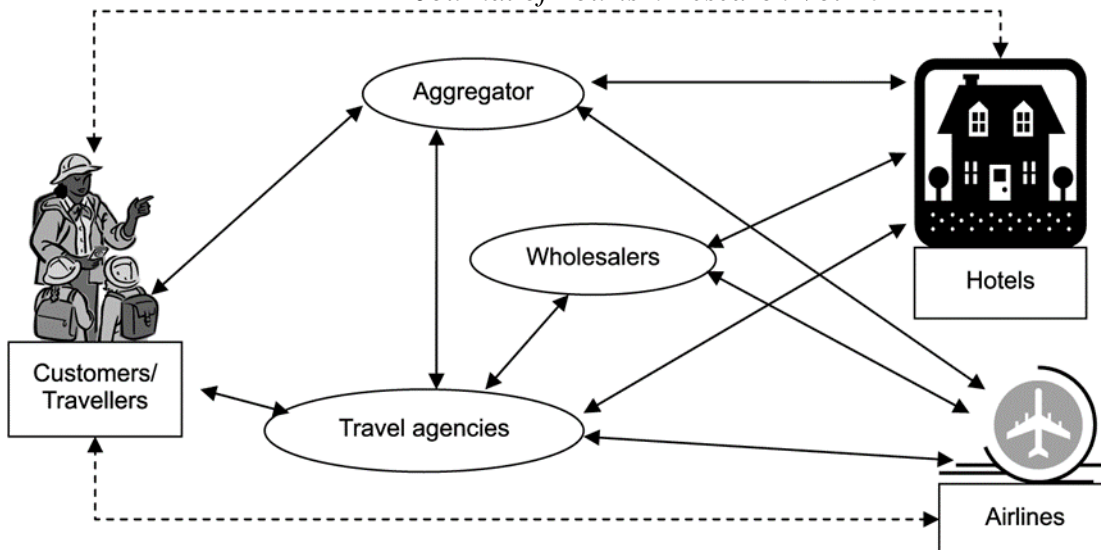
After the mid-90s the Internet has brought sweeping changes in the distribution of tourist services. The low cost web design and the growing tendency of consumers to purchase tour packages via the internet gave a new impetus to small and medium-sized enterprises in the sector but also to destinations market distributors is not calculated in their bids. Consumers soon discovered that they could make reservations at a much lower cost than that offered by the tour distributors (Middleton. et al.2009)

Brown and Locket (2007) describe the distribution system as modeled after the mid-2000s in the following figure:

The research of Brown and Lockett (2007) states that the tourist consumer can buy tourism products with both methods. The first is the traditional through intermediaries such as tour operators and tour operators. O second directly through tourism enterprises, often having as intermediary websites that offer free tourist offers like booking.com and expedia.com. As mentioned by Kim. et al (2007) in many cases tourist destinations have formed their own websites on which it can seek free accommodation and other tourist services. The end result is to reduce the costs of tourist services to 30%, and through social media can now tourists to be in direct contact with the company and to interact even with visitors. Furthermore changing the shape of competition with small and medium businesses that offer alternative and quality tourist services have made a dynamic entry into the market at the expense of something larger companies that are for the benefit of tourists.

The Internet has affected the way of promoting tourism organizations and destinations and this naturally affects the behavior of tourists as international consumers. Brown and Lockett (2007) point out that the Internet allows all tourism businesses and destinations to promote their products at very low cost, which can not be done with the use of traditional means of promotion. Middleton et al (2009) report that in the traditional marketing the main promotional tool for small destinations were the brochures and internet use multimedia allows the use of photos, videos and even a browser (virtual tour) and the feedback from social media is a tourist destination. This way the tourist can have a better view of the destination and decide on the choices made.

For tourism businesses, these new data are particularly important because the tourism industry is based on a very heavily in information handling. Since the decision to market the tourism product requires significant involvement in terms of time and effort for the consumer, the voltage potential buyers helped collect information through review websites, to online communities and other social media (Gretzel and Yoo , 2008). Businesses therefore should explore ways in which to integrate social media into marketing tools used to exploit the possibilities of communication with their customers.



3.2 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND A CREATING A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT

In today's society where work takes up one-third of the life of modern people, the holidays have become a necessity. Particularly in Greece but also in the world, tourism has great importance for the economy and society in general. Potential travelers have different personal needs and characteristics such as gender and age, socioeconomic status and the factors of the individual psychology exert influence on the final choice of a tourist destination and the conditions under which they will spend their holidays. Below are analyzed some of the processes that the person follows and the choices made on the road to ensure the holidays, with special reference to the influence of the use of the internet and especially social media, in consumer behavior.

The procedure followed by the traveler to any destination selection is subject to the logic sequence providing a stimulus of this stimulus analysis and action based on the stimulus. The stimulus from the environment, through the interaction or effect of the tourism marketing and of course through acquiring the necessary knowledge from other tourists who have used the social media to make comments. The message is analyzed by the upcoming traveler based on the temperament and the factors that characterize it, and the effect of the terms of destination choice and the decision to purchase other tourist services. According to Buhalis & Law (2008), the cost, the duration and the free time, the type of product, but also the nature of the provider of the tourist service, play a role in the final decision. Social media, in this frame of reference, playing a more important role since the customer will have the chance to see what other say. However the hotel also will have the chance to seek some important information regarding its performance such as some negative or positive comments. At the same time, it is important to show up that it listens to its customers and hence it is willing to collaborate with them.

In order to understand how important is to assess the existing knowledge and to make the tourist to collaborate. The tourist's decision about the final destination can be understood by P.I.E.C.E. model Morgan's in marketing (Middleton, 2001). This model includes the following five steps: identifying a problem (problem recognition), the subsequent information search (information search) and the

inclusion of options available (evaluation of alternatives), then the final decision to purchase the service or product (choice of purchase) and, finally, evaluation after purchase (evaluation of post-purchase experience). In relation of the use of social media, the tourist company or hotel in charge with the aim to attract the holiday maker in the sense that "need" vacation. After the first step, the tourism company must be familiar with sites where 'frequented' potential tourists and make the service or the hotel available and visible. So, at this point, it is important for the side of the hotel to acquire the necessary information and to transform it into a new knowledge. For example the trends of tourists or what they are asking for most of the times is a useful knowledge that the hotel's management would have to collaborate with the tourist so to extract it.

In evaluating alternative tourists compare the options and features, and the final decision touches upon the personal preferences for the type and location of the holiday, the type of facility, and other elements of the service provided, but also by the confidence in the company with which thinks to cooperate. The Tourist Company or hotel here has the purpose or role to adapt to customer preferences, or to change the customer's perception in relation to the destination or hotel (Middleton, 2001). After the decision, the tourist company should maintain the process of booking and payment as more utilitarian and austere may and, on the internet, it depends on the quality and ease of use of the company's website, but also on the possible supply option live feedback of the company member to complete the reservation and / or payment without difficulty. Finally, the evaluation after the service purchase (or rent accommodation) can be pushed towards a positive direction when the tourist company continues to interact with the tourist, not persistent and recurring but rather with gravity and clarity. Later, after leaving for the journey and upon return from vacation, it is clear that the hotel and the same destination itself will determine absolute degree satisfaction traveler - and the tourist company approach can enhance any positive experience and impression of the traveler obtained, for example through incentives from the hotel for the return of the traveler in the future and the question to the traveler if you wanted to change something in a future visit. The evaluation process is the most important for the process of acquiring the knowledge. This is the point where the tourist will evaluate his experiences on social media. It is important from the side of the hotel to collect this data and to make the tourist to become part of the hotel's development.

There are some additional steps that the tourism business must take into account in its attempts to lure the traveler to purchase the product or service or renting accommodation. Buhalis & Law (2008) cite a number of actions and tactics that a hotel can add to marketing mix in order to maximize the benefit. In particular object of the use of internet, Tourist Company / hotel that aims to motivate consumers to travel will be curated content appearance and overall quality of the site, information and social networking capabilities that it provides. For example, the emergence of the corporate website should stand out and not reminiscent of similar websites of other similar companies (World Tourism Organization, 2008). In addition, the information provided should be broad and refer to specific details of the destination, accommodation, and their characteristics, so that the tourist can organize his time and the options adequately, but should and there is the provision of interconnection with other cooperative or non-competitive sites so that the potential traveler may go to hotel page with ease (World Tourism Organization, 2008). Kotler et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of using social media as a mode of interaction for the final decision. In the conventional model of taking a decision on tourist destination, friends and relatives may play a role. With the help of internet and social media, the newest model online social media often play the same, basic or complementary role.

When the final decision is taken and the traveler is in the hotel, the dedication in the service can be strengthened through the adoption of specific policies, such as the recruitment of new technology (eg, choice of meals through the internet) the provision of tempting options (eg free visit and photographed landmarks in the area) and the ability of customers to directly update their personal pages on social media (Kotler et al., 2010). In this way the endearing practices of tourists after the end of their journey to share pictures can be accelerated. The use of such options may seem opportunistic and speculative, but it is a great opportunity to enhance the online image of the hotel which, if not exploited, can lose it if, for example, visitors discover other, more interesting scenery and interest and decide not to "move up" images from the hotel.

The reactions of the potential of tourism enterprises and tourist clients of hotel establishments vary from person to person and from situation to situation. Each visitor is attracted by different features and options available, and even the same person at different periods of his life, can seek and fascinated by different things. Consequently, the provider of tourism services must take into account these differences when developing the marketing mix and apply, to the extent that it is realistic, in a personalized approach to each visitor based on both the online profile on social media and other available features.

The incentives governing a potential visitor provide the tourist business an asset to form the best possible image to optimize satisfaction. Social media is, in this context, a particularly useful tool in this direction. Some of the variables that influence the choice of tourist information including gender, age and ethnicity, all those are an important knowledge that the tourist company can use as a knowledge. Thus, women appear to be particularly keen on the use of new technologies and especially in sites with tourist information, compared with men who do not show any clear preference (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012). While young adults aged 25 to 35 years prefer devotional sites with tourist content and "Room conversation» (chat rooms) as a means of collecting tourist information, while older adults over 50 years old have a more neutral stance (Spars & Browing, 2011). The nationality of the tourist visitor seems to be another relevant factor. For example, the Northern Europeans tourists tend to prefer a combination of information from the Internet and from their traditional local travel agent while in other countries, the nationality factor does not seem to play an important role (Varmeulen & Seegers, 2009). All of the above conclude that the social media can be tool which will help the hotel's management collect valuable information, while it will transform the guest into a valuable partner of the hotel

4 DISCUSSION

The internet is an important tool for all disciplines. But important is the presence of tourism enterprises on the Internet for the reason that it allows almost all companies to have direct access to the public through social media and influence the audience and behavior. Middleton et al (2009) refer to the fact that in today's economy based on information via the internet is the greatest benefit for small and medium-sized destinations. For many years, especially in the 90s, the tourism industry depended on a few intermediaries, particularly tour operators, which govern thousands of companies in the industry. Small businesses were not the necessary resources to access directly to consumers since advertising from traditional media require significant financial resources and manpower. After the mid-90s the Internet has brought sweeping changes in the distribution of tourist services. The low

cost web design and the growing tendency of consumers to purchase tour packages via the internet gave a new impetus to small and medium-sized enterprises in the sector but also to destinations market distributors is not calculated in their bids. Consumers soon discovered that they could make reservations at a much lower cost than that offered by the tour distributors (Middleton et al, 2009)

Tsiotsou and Ratten (2010) reported on the positive advantages of advertising platforms such as Google AdWords and advertising through social networks like Facebook. The advantage of these ads, except for very low cost, is the potential for providing targeted advertising based on the demographics of users and their geographical distribution. With the proper use of the keywords (keywords) can the tour operator to have direct access to the target audience. Middleton et al. (2009) write that can for a small financial consideration to place the site of landing the first choices of search engines. Indeed reports that the effective use of advertising mechanisms like AdWords has made Google (which is the AdWords creator) to be among the largest companies in the advertising industry and has increased revenues from traditional providers advertisements like newspapers and television. It should be mentioned that there is no official statistics but mainly studies such as the GTO and SETE, which is the most recent (December 2014) and was made in collaboration with Google, based in statistics Oxford Economics, in order be the Grow Greek Tourism Online.

The main points of the study carried out by the above entities were:

- The use of social media and the internet in general by tourism operators in Greece is not expected
- The increase of internet use can result in GDP growth of 3% and 100,000 new jobs
- There is space for a 20% increase in bookings through internet (Newsbomb, 2014).

From SETE (2014) stated that the Internet can be changed, if it has not already made the purchase in the hotel industry. Already Tsiotsou and Ratten (2010) predicted that by 2016 over 80% of bookings will be made through Internet. This means that changing the structure of the industry, since functions such as travel agents will decrease and consumers will buy services directly from the provider.

Actually, what is important, is to turn the customer / guest into the partner of the hotel and to extract valuable information. For example the positive or the negative evaluation of the services made from the customer and to use this information as valuable knowledge which will help the hotel to improve. It is understood that the customer becomes a valuable partner of the hotel. Of course from the side of the hotel it is useful to construct methods where the customer will operate as the sole partner and he will provide valuable knowledge in a collaborative environment.

Overall, Undoubtedly, the internet has impacted every business life. The tourism industry has allowed several companies that previously had very limited exposure to the public, they can interact with potential visitor's tourist destinations and hotels using social media and promote their services. Through the new Internet economy formed, the great benefit sometimes obscure or limited scope destinations have gained (Middleton et al., 2009). As we have seen, until the '90s, the tourism industry was the absence of alternatives, dependent on a small number of large companies-intermediaries, which absorbed a disproportionately large part of the revenue derived from thousands of tourist enterprises. Small businesses did not have the financial capacity to carry out major advertising campaigns to increase their brand awareness in the general public, as the traditional ways of promotion was unprofitable in terms of financial and human resources. The logic of reduced costs, the web offers many economic opportunities for advertising, such as Google AdSense program and

the Facebook social networking medium. Beyond affordability, the big advantage of these technologies is the ability to target ads to specific layers of the users into account dozens of variables demographic characteristics and geographical distribution (Tsiotsou & Ratten, 2010). By careful use of keywords (keywords), the tourism companies, whether large or small, gain accessibility to population subgroups that have chosen to promote travel and hotel products and services. Also it is vital not only to target tourists but also to bring them close with the company so to provide their own testimonies and experiences through social media. Hence the social media are becoming a tool for acquiring new knowledge and turn them the tourist into a collaborator of the hotel industry. This is something that almost every Greek tourist business must seek, since SEKE (2014) has argued that most of the Greek hotel businesses do not know how to use the social media and to acquire the knowledge which is in it.

5 CONCLUSIONS

With the use of new technologies in tourism all operational functions may be supported. New technology provides all the tools that are necessary to find significant profitable sectors in the market to promote products with specialized instruments. Through new technologies can reduce costs and greatly increase awareness, communication and the way the tourism industry function. High technology enables the consumer through the tools which offer to buy the right product while giving suppliers the tools that are necessary for the development, management and distribution of their products worldwide. Through new technology, the tourism industry can develop and to market products which wishes. The paper examined how the social media can become an instrument of acquiring knowledge from the customers while at the same time the customer turns into a useful source of information; actually someone who can collaborate. This is very useful for the Greek tourist companies so to turn them their social media and their customer's information into a useful source of competitive advantage. It is important, though, to examine the view of the companies in this sector. For this reason, it is proposed that for a future research it would be useful to make a qualitative data in sample of managers who work on the sector so to see how they are working the social media in the real cases and what are the potentials of the use of social media.

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