THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE DESTINATION OF POTENTIAL TOURISTS

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Abstract:

This article describes social media and its impact on choosing the destination of potential tourists. The first part of the article is called *Social Media and its position on the tourist market*. Social media, like Facebook or Instagram, are internet platforms or applications used by people to communicate online. The ability to book and plan a trip is more and more computerized. Tourists choose services and products that have as many positive opinions as possible on social media. Among the types of marketing used on the Internet, the following are worth mentioning: social media marketing, viral marketing, destination marketing and influencer marketing. Trendsetting, blogs and vlogs can be highlighted as current trends on the Internet. The next part *Instagram traveller and its impact on cultural environment* shows approach of a tourist being driven by social media to popular relics, attractions and tourist places. Negative effects of increased tourist activity are seen in destinations such as Machu Picchu or the Great Wall of China. The next part of this article *Social media and its influence on tourists* raises the subjects of psychological and sociological phenomena occurring in social media that concerns a potential tourist. Such phenomena may have positive and negative effects on tourists. *Summary*: The Internet and social media will continue to be an integral part of lives of a huge number of people all around the world. The power with which media influences potential tourists depends on their own character and level of self-awareness.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is the age of technology development, which has an increasing impact on people, regardless of their age, education or place of residence. Increasingly younger social groups are more and more connected and dependent on it. The average European has several accounts on many social networks, logging into the application and creating virtual portraits of the person. To a large extent, real life steps away to be replaced by

virtual reality in which people are taught how to communicate through emoticons[1]. Social networks are a modern arena where people show off in every possible way. This applies to all aspects of life, including traveling. Often the motivation to go on a trip is to impress the peers who being envious of beautifully taken pictures will want to set on a journey themselves. Nowadays, tourism has also become one of the areas in which people compete. The original destination is important, which one can proudly talk about.

The role of social media in the tourism economy is constantly growing. The development of technology is of great importance in the tourism industry, not only in the form of reservation systems or online agencies, but also through the travellers themselves. Thanks to ubiquitous access to the Internet and the ever more rapidly growing branch of applications, available on devices, travellers promote tourism, specifically visited regions where they relax. Through this behaviour, tourists influence the decision on the destination of their friends or people associated with them.

The main goal of the article is to present the impact of social media on decisions made by tourists. Statistical data on the impact of social media on the tourism economy were also presented and discussed. The article answers the following questions: What is the impact of social media on tourists, what are the benefits, and what are the disadvantages of using social media when choosing a destination? Also, the influence of social media on the emotions and behaviour of tourists has been described. The research methods used in the work were mainly based on the analysis of collected materials, literature on the subject and online resources, i.e. Desk Research method.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS POSITION ON THE TOURIST MARKET

Social media are platforms that appear in the form of websites or applications available on a phone or tablet, which allows people using them to communicate with each other in different ways. Therefore, one of the main goals of social media will be building and maintaining interpersonal relations [Bogacka 2017: 99]. Most often, social media is used by youth [Forst 2017: 39]. People can communicate on social media using emoticons, leaving comments, chatting or giving likes[2].

The most well-known social media are: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest, Google+ and LinkedIn.

- **Twitter** is a portal on which registered users can post posts on their profile, known as tweets, of any character, and followers can comment on them. A huge advantage of Twitter is the large number of highly active celebrities who constantly inform their fans about their activities.
- **Facebook** is an undeniable leader in terms of the number of active users. By September 2017, their number amounted to 2 061 million [www.statista.com, date of access: 03.01.2018]. The ability to conduct private conversations through online chat makes Facebook the main tool for interacting with its users. Facebook is also a collection of countless profiles of companies that organize contests and encourage Facebook users to like their profile, purchase their products and inform their friends about them.

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[1] Emoticon – ideogram consisting of a sequence of typographic characters, used to express the mood on the Internet. It usually depicts a face, rotated 90 ° counterclockwise.
[2] Like - on the Internet: a mark on a post, showing that we like it or that we agree with it.

- **YouTube** is, just behind Facebook, one of the largest social networking sites and the second most-used Internet search engine in the world [www.online-sales-marketing.com, date of access: 03.01.2018]. The portal itself is one of the largest websites on which one can listen to music for free and watch popular music videos, short videos as well as movies. YouTube is the dominant platform which contains a lot of music on the Internet, which classifies it as an important music market in the world [Flak, Robak 2016: 177].
- **Instagram** is a very popular social media platform mainly involving the sharing of photos and videos by registered users. The published photos are described with a hashtag[3], which is used to mark and categorize information, e.g. #Barcelona. Hashtag allows to find information very quickly. Referring to the example set previously, this means that after entering the word "Barcelona", users will be shown photos published on Instagram with just this hashtag, i.e. "#Barcelona".

The number of people using smartphones in Poland is over 6 million, and the most common service that is used by people is social media [Borek 2017: 66].

Recognizing the distributive potential of social media, companies have changed the way the portals are used. In the place for communication between friends, which was social media, a new virtual market was created. Over 50% of small companies confirm that social media helped increase their sales, and 70% reported a return on investment [www.forbes.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. Having a profile on social media is necessary for any tourist company to exist on the tourist market. According to Booking.com surveys: one in two trips start on a mobile device; 70% of surveyed tourists did an earlier research about traveling using a smartphone, and 50% of millennials discovered new travel companies during searches on mobile devices [www.trekksoft.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. Tourists also use OTAs[4], which must be available to their clients twenty-four hours a day throughout the week. Online reservations increased by 1700% from 2011 to 2015, increasing online profit from 1% to 18% [www.fredericgonzalo.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. About 79% of tourists operating on their phones, after the research, booked an online trip [www.trekksoft.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. According to a website Trekk Soft, web reservations are to exceed 26% of global sales on trips and attractions until 2019 [www.trekksoft.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. The information above shows how mobile devices are a tremendous part in planning and traveling.

People have changed the way of planning a trip and booking transport, ceasing the use of services from stationary sellers, and starting to use websites, direct or private organizers of travel or hoteliers [www.theguardian.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. One of the reasons for this behaviour is the belief of a lower price for a product or service purchased via the Internet, because the purchase takes place without intermediaries [Pawlicz 2012: 75] In addition, more than 70% of tourists will pay more for a hotel if it has better opinions on social media [www.trekksoft.com, date of access: 07.01.2018].

Tourists use social media to gain knowledge about the country they want to go to, learn about the opinions from other users about this country or search for recommendations among friends [www.dcsplus.net, date of access: 07.01.2018]. The average client uses a combination of at least 19 different websites and mobile applications to share thoughts and experiences while traveling [www.bcg.com, date of access: 07.01.2018]. According to data from the conference organized by EyeforTravel in 2016, 97% Millennials share photos while traveling on Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram [www.fredericgonzalo.com, date of access: 07.01.2018].

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[3] Hashtag – a word (or an expression without a spaces) with the # sign added at the beginning.
[4] OTA - Online Travel Agency

Nearly 60% of DMOs[5] plan to allocate their budget on digital message, that is a website and its development. More and more tourist organizations are opting for a "digital-first" strategy, i.e. digital media before paper media, to create an inspiring and emotionally moving brand [www.trekksoft.com, date of access: 07.01.2018].

Nowadays, social media is considered one of the most effective marketing and communication tools [Niesłony 2016: 73]. Thanks to the use of various types of internet marketing through social media, companies become known, the demand for offered products increases, the number of loyal customers grows, a list of new potential customers is generated, sales rise, companies have better insight into the market situation and they grow [www. statista.com, date of access: 04.01.2018].

The most popular marketing methods in social media are:

- *Social media marketing*, or marketing in social media, thanks to it the company is able to gather and communicate with its potential clients in one place. Manufacturers are in constant contact with their clients, which in the case of the tourist market is of great importance [www.promodo.com, date of access: 04.01.2018]. The characteristics of social media, favours obtaining feedback immediately. As a result, manufacturers are able to react quickly and correct errors.
- *Viral marketing*, according to E. Gębicka [2017: 24], means any strategy, which persuades the recipients to spread information content among other people, which leads to the general growth of recipients. The word "viral" has been used as a metaphor for a fast information spread process, leading to "infecting", that is, informing a large number of people in a very short amount of time.
- *Destination marketing* is a type of marketing that promotes destinations (e.g. country, region) in order to increase the number of visitors [www.promodo.com, date of access: 04.01.2018]. Popular ways to promote the destination on the Internet are photos, articles, contests and, most effective: reviews of well-known bloggers[6], vloggers[7], trendsetters[8]. From social media platforms that are best suited for destination marketing is Instagram. Instagram, thanks to the fact that it is based on sharing photos, is the power of visual communication. Image messages, appearing on social media, are increasingly influencing the creation of social aesthetic standards [Musiał 2017: 58].
- *Influence marketing* focuses on marketing with the help of people considered as influencers, i.e. individuals with an impact on a wide range of recipients [www.socialpress.pl, date of access: 05.01.2018]. Celebrities, politicians, athletes, reporters as well as well-known bloggers can be considered as influencers. The key to success of *influence marketing* is the authenticity and credibility of the person performing the role of the influencer. According to a study by Linqia, 56% of surveyed companies reported an increased number of activities on their websites after the use of influencer marketing [www.adweek.com, date of access: 05.01.2018]. People influenced by an influencer promoting a specific tourist destination will want to visit this place because they trust the assurances of their idol about the authenticity of the product.

Thanks to social media, blogs and travel vlogs are very popular. They have a large number of recipients, which is why their authors often become trendsetters and influencers.

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[5] DMO – (Destination Marketing Organization) – marketing organizations of destinations that promote a given region, city or country in order to increase the number of people visiting it.
[6] Blogger – a person who publishes their blog, a network journal, on the Internet. Blog can have different themes, including travel.
[7] Vlogger – author of the vlog, or video blog, an online journal in the form of video recordings.
[8] Trendsetter – a person who promotes or creates a trend.

Trendsetting is nothing other than establishing or influencing new trends or fashion. It is also the creation of new ways of using or consuming services and products by people establishing new trends and participating in the promotion of these goods [www.6ix.pl, date of access: 05.01.2018]. Trendsetters differ from influencers in that they themselves create a new fashion or trend, when the influencers promote them, they make them known thanks to the large number of recipients [https://journolink.com, date of access: 05.01.2018]. Depending on the theme of the blog, bloggers become experts in the eyes of their followers in the field they present.

The most well-known Polish portals dedicated to the subject of travel are e.g. „Busem przez Świat", „Podróżniccy", „Paragon z podróży", „Życie jest piękne".

„Busem przez świat" – was named the Travel Blog of the Year 2014 from around 2,600 Polish travel blogs [www.busemprzezswiat.pl, date of access: 05.01.2018]. The blog contains reports on expeditions, guides and insights regarding tourist equipment. The blog has 128,000 fans on Facebook.

From outstanding foreign blogs, the following are worth mentioning: „The Blonde Abroad", „Nomadic Matt" and „Migrationology".

The number of fans of the "Nomadic Matt" blog on Facebook contains almost 234,000 [www.facebook.com, date of access: 06.01.2018]. The author of the blog is Matthew Kepnes, who left his job as an official to travel around the world and write about his experiences. As an official earning $ 35,000 a year, he became a blogger-traveller with earnings of $ 750,000 a year in a span of a couple years. His experiences and travels inspired thousands of people who follow his steps. Matt teaches his followers how not to be afraid to travel, how to prepare for travel and how to make money abroad [www.cnbc.com, date of access: 06.01.2018].

INSTAGRAM TRAVELER AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CULTURAL AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Social media promotes specific travel destinations, which has negative and positive effects. The advantage will certainly be an increase in tourist traffic in a given location and the growth of the local economy, which has an impact on the national economy. However, the most common disadvantages of such event are: degradation of the environment and loss of authenticity of the place caused by mass tourism. Tourists traveling to places because of their popularity in tourism, often do not care about culture or about the environment. Such tourists often only care about taking a "selfie"[9]. The most frequently marked cities on Instagram are: New York, Moscow and London. In the first place of tourist attractions that was most visited and photographed by Instagram users is Disneyland located in California, which has been hashtagged[10] around 14,62 million times. Next in order are: Eiffel Tower, Walt Disney World Resort and South Beach in Florida, Berlin Wall, Las Vegas, Big Ben, Time Square and Notre Dame [https://www.statista.com, date of access: 27.01.2018].

Popularity in social media in the form of an increased number of tourists could be seen in equally high-class destinations/monuments, including: Machu Picchu, Leaning Tower of Pisa, Great Wall of China, Sheikh Zayed *Grand Mosque* in Abu Dhabi and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

Machu Picchu, or the city of the Incas, is one of the currently most famous travel destinations. Most people when asked about what the appearance of Machu Picchu looks like, would be able to roughly describe the appearance of this place, even if the respondents did not visit it themselves. This is due to the promotion of this place in social media. Machu Picchu

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[9] Selfie – photo taken by oneself with a digital camera or a mobile phone, held in hand or on a selfie stick. Selfie are usually made in order to put them on social media.

[10] To hashtag – tag keywords in the photo description or internet posts with a hashtag.

has seen a significant increase in tourist activity in recent years. Currently, hundreds of photographs of this monument can be found on social networks. In 2014, over 1.2 million tourists visited Machu Picchu. In connection with the crisis of this situation and most likely the degradation of this place, local authorities intend to introduce restrictions on the number of visitors to the attraction and increase the admission prices [www.independent.co.uk, date of access: 27.01.2018].

The Monument commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, i.e. the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, becomes an equally neglected place. The place itself is not only a mass tourism spot, but also is not being respected properly by tourists behaving inappropriately. Mostly young tourists climb stone blocks and take funny poses in order to take a selfie and put it on Instagram [www.independent.co.uk, date of access: 27.01.2018].

Mass tourism and inappropriate behaviour are often caused by the urge of tourists to take pictures and put them on one of the portals or a few of them. The research carried out by Kurczewski R. and Machnik A. shows that tourists are not interested in the general surroundings, the area as a whole with all its elements, but individual objects that are characterized by a certain uniqueness or popularity [2007: 97]. This leads to the conclusion that tourists often travel to a given place only because taking a photo in a chosen destination will bring them some social benefits.

THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISTS

Social media is a tool for social communication, and therefore, they run psychological and sociological processes. Psychological factors of social media will refer to users as individual units (e.g. self-created "I" on the portal). Sociological factors of social media refer to social interaction on social media.

Social media is a powerful tool that influences the feelings of their users. Although one can define social media with a virtual reality, the effects of using these portals reflect on people in the real world. The negative impact of social media on their users is presented below.

According to research by the British philanthropic organization "Scope", 60% of 1,500 adult British surveyed who are users of Twitter and Facebook are envious of other users from these portals. About 30% of respondents believe that social media makes them feel alone [www.mediapost.com, date of access: 11.01.2018]. The sense of loneliness and jealousy forces people to change their behaviour and submit to the prevailing norms in social media. Under the influence of the public, or friends on Facebook, the behaviour of the publisher, striving for acceptance and increase in popularity, changes [Flores 2017: 48]. In the media, therefore, a crooked picture of oneself is created - a new sense of one's own identity, not necessarily corresponding to the actual state. Portal users are often jealous of other users, spending their holidays in exotic places and ensuring great time spent on their Facebook boards.

This is due to the so-called FOMO effect, that is *The Fear of Missing Out*, i.e. fear of omission. This fear is characterized by its owners with the fear of missing something vital, exciting and being forever lost. This fear is deepened by social media, where friends add photos from trips, from a journey full of life and exciting experiences, and people who observe them feel that they have a "worse" less exciting life. FOMO can act on potential tourists in two ways: it will either force its users to act or just the opposite. According to D.

Herman's research, approximately 70% of the population is affected by FOMO [www.wethecrowd.pl, date of access: 26.01.2018].

Social media also torments their users to seek something new on their own. When information is provided "on a tray", Internet users do not dive into the culture and history of a given place. Often guided by the need for acceptance, they travel to specific destinations only to take a selfie. A lot of misleading information can be found on social networks, especially in the form of photos. A skilfully captured photo can distort the truth and present the destination in a much brighter light than it really is. It mostly concerns well-known tourist attractions.

In addition to the many negative factors influencing the users of social media, the benefits of having an account on social media can be mentioned.

The media is a source of inspiration and motivation. A raised feeling of jealousy in social media can transform into a strong motivational stimulus that will help one change the surroundings and bad habits for the better. According to a questionnaire from Adweek, 52% of Facebook users surveyed said that a photo of a friend inspired their travel plans [www.adweek.com, date of access: 26.01.2018].

Social media is a place to communicate, thanks to it, people make friends, even with people from abroad and help to stay in touch with close ones. Social networks such as Facebook provide a sense of belonging and acceptance. Twitter allows its users to share their experience and achievements, which increases self-confidence and helps gain recognition while satisfying the need for self-esteem.

According to M. Gulda [2013: 161], tourism in the aspect of the humanities, is treated as a social process. Social media have a huge number of travel fans who help each other giving advice on, for example, transport, attractions worth visiting, security and often offering accommodation. Also, the possibility of establishing a connection with people living in places that are the destinations of users' travel brings huge benefits in the form of information and overcoming personal barriers and stereotypes. Tourists making contacts with local people in a distant country are often delighted with their openness and hospitality [Liśkiewicz 2007: 187].

Thanks to the applications of various types of tourists, they are able to find a way, find cheap accommodation in the city they have just arrived to and keep them up to date with the events that take place in the area. There is no need to have paper maps and travel books when all the useful information is available on the Internet on the websites of experienced bloggers twenty-four hours a day.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Just like modern technology and the Internet, social media have a huge impact on the daily lives of many people, including tourists. Tourists use and will use new applications, programs and websites that enable them to, in their opinion, travel better. Travellers' blogs become more and more popular as well as travellers themselves, some of them even become idols and are inspiration to many people. On discussion forums people talk about their travels, exchange experiences and help plan other users' trips.

The media have a huge motivational power and depending on the degree of identifying the destination with their own goals and desires, the tourist will be inspired or guided by the decision of other users of these media. It follows that the influence of the media will be different for people with varying degrees of self-awareness. A traveller who knows what he wants will benefit from the experience of other users. A person susceptible to influences of other people or wanting to travel without specific goals will decide for destinations proposed

on social media, also using the experience of others, but without manifesting their own creative interference.

The number of people using social media in the world in 2018 is almost 3 billion people [www.statista.com, date of access: 15.05.2018]. Social media has an influence on every single person using it in some way, to a greater or lesser extent, because people use it and derive information from it. The media are an inseparable companion of young people, and they are the future. Based on this data, it can be concluded that the popularity and diversity of the media will grow and further ground its position.

In summary, it is worth using social media, from the experience of long-term travellers, whose authenticity is measurable, to get useful information. It is important not to follow the crowd that takes dozens of photos at the Leaning Tower of Pisa but to look for something on one's own and dive deeper into local attractions that are widely available outside the reach of mass social media.

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