

TOURISM IN THE COVID-19 ERA AND THE ATTEMPT TO SAVE IT WITH THE HELP OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

In the year 2020 people have faced an extremely serious crisis in the tourism industry, and not only, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people and their families were severely affected, which had financial consequences for all branches of industry. One of the most affected industries is tourism, from all over the world. This year hotels, restaurants, bars, museums, transport companies, both on land, sea and on air, have been closed for more than 6 months. Many of these are bankrupt or on the verge of bankruptcy. In the short time they were open they operated at low capacity due to restrictions imposed by the government as well as due to the population's concern about their health or the financial problems they face.

Keywords: *Tourism, pandemic, COVID-19, e-marketing, recovery strategies, social media*

Introduction

Online promotion and trends in the tourism industry are, as it is in nature and in the field, in constant motion and change. It is difficult to keep up with the latest tourism news and effective promotion methods for this industry. This industry can be a challenge that many do not feel ready to face, especially in 2020, due to the pandemic with Covid- 19.¹

1. Social media and tourism

Social networks have become the most handy tool in the business environment, have a major impact on people and you can pass on information much more easily regardless of nationality or social status. For example, the social media can greatly help tourism's global visibility.

Currently there are over 50 social networks that people communicate, inform, have fun and purchase both products and services. The most important social networks are:

- Facebook - with over 1,310,000,000 members globally;
- Flirck - is a worldwide network of information such as image and photography; a picture is as much as 1000 words;

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¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-commission-tourism-transport-2020-and-beyond_ro.pdf

- LinkedIn - over 300,000,000 users, a platform focused on career management and professional relationships;
- Instagram - has over 400,000,000 users, the network is focused on promoting products and services through photos and videos;
- Pinterest - has over 70,000,000 users, the platform is focused on photography, gifs and videos in order to promote products and services online;
- Twitter - with over 1,000,000,000 users, is used for fast promotion through relatively short messages;
- Youtube - with over 1,500,000,000 users, this platform is focused on videos with extremely varied content; it promotes products, services and people;
- Google + - over 200,000,000 users, this platform is a direct competitor of Facebook;
- MySpace - has over 250,000,000 users from all over the world.

As you can see, social networks have become a real phenomenon among people who use these social networks, or rather, live on these social networks on average 3-4 hours a day. This fact gives an extraordinary power to influence people depending on the content posted on these platforms.

From the point of view of promoting tourist destinations around the world, airlines, hotels, guesthouses, these networks have played an extraordinary role. Posting constant photo and video content on all these platforms brings an immediate benefit among young people especially those who are connected to these platforms.

Bloggers, such as Razvan Pascu, Cezar Dumitru, Aventurescu and many others spread all over the world, promote various tourist destinations. Blogger and vlogger posts attract millions of views making followers want to visit these destinations with any financial sacrifice.

Currently, due to the pandemic with Covid-19, the number of bookings has decreased by 70% compared to the previous year, but this decrease in bookings may diminish due to the fact that the future of tourism is uncertain. According to statistics given by major travel agencies, many tourists buy their last minute vacation to benefit from discounts and avoid some inconvenience if tourism stops again.

As you can see in the figure below, the number of people who used air transport between March 7 and October 27 had a dramatic decrease, reaching -120%, a phenomenon we have never faced before.



The social networks detailed above lead a real "fight" to try to awaken the adventurous spirit of the tourist as well as the desire to visit various tourist destinations and still go on a vacation no matter how short, even nationally, if not he risks leaving the country for fear that he could be quarantined for 2 weeks or not be able to return to the country of residence for a longer period than he intended.

2. Online Promotion Tools - Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

In last years, it has been rumored that the best promotion is not the traditional one, with banners, flyers or television commercials, but online promotion, more precisely with the help of Social Media and adjacent promotion tools.

In a world in a permanent change and transformation, when people spend a lot of time online, travel agencies, tour operators, airlines, hotels, guesthouses must be promoted online, otherwise they do not exist!

The most frequented social platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, Pintest, Befio- new social network, Myspace, Flickr and others) have a lot of content related to promotion. These platforms are, in fact, becoming the most important online promotion tool.



The main methods of online promotion both free (organic) that give value to tourist destinations in general and paid (outbound) allow a targeted promotion to buy a certain vacation, accommodation reservation or any other adjacent services. These are:

- Content marketing;
- Organized both online and offline events;
- Posting interesting data / events / parties / holidays for tourists;
- Presented the offers in a new way, different from the competition;
- The presentation of the tourist destinations in great detail, with everything that would interest the tourist;
- Create video content and post it both on the hosting site and on blogs or vlogs;
- Free promotion on Google Adwords;
- Using the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to help the site be indexed on the first pages of Google;

- The post finds on Social Media quality written or video materials (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, Pinterest, Befio- new social network, Myspace, Flickr and others);
- Written communication on profile groups and forums;
- Creating quality video content posted on Facebook and Youtube attracts a lot of views;
- Created a community of followers;
- Email marketing attracts a lot of customers;
- The promotion paid on Social Media brings a lot of views and implicitly customers;
- Created forms directly on the site / Facebook page for the request for personalized offers;
- Using affiliate marketing - allows the customer to be sent to the desired site by clicking a link;
- Signed partnerships with other companies in the field;
- Opening to new paid promotion methods;
- Optimized for distribution in social networks;
- Directing people to your site through other sites / blogs / vlogs / social media channels through links;
- Encourage people to recommend you through the use of rewards.

3. E-marketing strategies to support tourism

A marketing plan is proposed to accelerate the development of a tourism technology system for hosting business information (E-Tourism) on the Internet. It also includes e-commerce as well as the application of information technology in marketing. The necessary control and protection mechanism must be put in place to ensure the prevention of problems.

A main objective is the organization and development of management, as well as the development of the capacity of human resources to create a capable driving force in operation. Moreover, this aims to strengthen the potential for international competition under good governance, as well as to develop the organization's resilience to its technical roles, as well as the need for marketing knowledge.

Another proposal is to promote cooperation at all levels at domestic and international promotion for the development of tourism markets. This aims to get rid of all obstacles in the tourism industry and open up new possibilities for this industry.

It is also necessary to promote and develop the operation of proactive marketing strategies for the growth of new markets, as well as in niche markets. This is in order to attract more quality tourists to visit various tourist attractions. At the same time, it is necessary to strongly encourage tourists to be interested in domestic travel.

It is necessary to promote the tourism industry, to be an important tool in addressing the country's economic problem, creating jobs for people, as well as increasing income for the country. Moreover, promotion should be done to make tourism playing a key role in developing the quality of life in all countries, as well as in the policy of governments in each country.

An extremely important tool in the online promotion of tourist destinations is virtual reality. One of the main industries that use virtual reality is tourism. These virtual tours help potential tourists in choosing the desired vacation.

Sites that have this VR technology implemented on tourism sites have much higher traffic, and the time spent much longer on navigate to the site compared to other profile sites.

There is several benefits for VR technology: in addition to the fact that some people spend a lot of time on the site looking for destinations they want to visit in the future, but return to the same site and recommend it to friends, if they like it.

Instead, with a virtual reality headset or HTC Vive it gives you more information about the desired destinations.

Virtual reality and virtual reality is the newest and most interesting method of online promotion so far, we could say that it is really revolutionary. If, initially, some companies were skeptical about these virtual tours, believing that they could lose their customers, these tours only intensified the desire of customers to visit and see with their own eyes some destinations.

The year 2020 is an atypically year from a tourist and economic point of view alike, due to the pandemic with Covid-19, the number of reservations decreased in the first half of the year by 44% compared to the previous year, but this decrease in reservations could decrease due to the fact that the holiday season in some countrys. According to statistics given by major travel agencies, many tourists buy their last minute vacation to benefit from discounts and avoid some inconvenience if tourism stops again.



The impact of the pandemic crisis puts the EU's tourism ecosystem under unprecedented pressure. As a result of travel and other restrictions, tourism has gradually ceased to operate in the first quarter of 2020 in the EU and worldwide. The OECD estimates that this decline in activity is between 45% and 70%, depending on the duration of the health crisis and the pace of recovery. Businesses in the tourism sector are facing an acute liquidity crisis. According to tourism industry estimates, revenue level have reached 86% for hotels and restaurants, 86% for tour operators and travel agencies, 86% for long-distance rail transport and 91% for cruises and airlines.²

The crisis has affected SMEs the most: in the absence of liquidity and facing uncertainty, they are struggling to stay afloat, gain access to finance and maintain their employees and staff. In the absence of immediate action and emergency funding to cover

² <https://osha.europa.eu/ro/publications/covid-19-back-workplace-adapting-workplaces-and-protecting-workers/view>

the period until the resumption of tourist flows, many businesses could go bankrupt in the coming weeks or months.³

Tourism can also benefit from the digital transition, offering new ways to manage travel and tourist flows, opportunities and more options, as well as more efficient use of limited resources. Using the analysis of large volumes of data can create and share precise segments of the tourism profile and can contribute to understanding the trends and needs of tourists. This can allow tourism to respond immediately to changing customer demand and provide a predictive analysis based on models.

Finally, the application of blockchain technology would allow economic operators in the tourism sector to have all available information on secure transactions. Digital tools can also be confidence-building measures to ensure that tourism and travel can be safe. This means investing in digital skills, including cybersecurity and the encouragement of digital innovation, as well as connecting businesses and tourism actors with existing data spaces at local and regional level (for example, through ongoing work related to the European Mobility Data Area).

This is particularly important in rural, remote and outermost regions, where tourism is fragmented and highly dependent on the accessibility of information and transport and travel services.

Conclusion

Strongly hit by the spread of coronavirus, the tourism industry will have a long way to go to reach pre-crisis levels.

Given the fact that the entire field of tourism has been "on hold" since the declaration of the pandemic, a policy of postponing holidays has been adopted throughout the industry, and not to cancel them. Both the airlines and our local partners offer the opportunity to change travel dates or receive travel vouchers valid for 1 or 2 years. Customers were offered the option to choose between changing travel dates or receiving a voucher valid for 2 years. However, most of the tourists opted for a new period for their vacation. The problem occurs if the situation does not return to a "normality" in which to travel without restrictions.

In conclusion, those who work in the tourism industry do not have many solutions to use to recover their losses and, certainly, many are on the verge of bankruptcy.

Apart from the support provided so far by governments and other measures under discussion, the losses already exist. Recovery will be slow and time consuming.

Ideally, during this period, the bureaucracy should be abandoned, in other words, the measures taken should be easier to apply and should not require so much paperwork and reduce taxes. This means financing for tourism companies and other affected sectors with 100% government-guaranteed loans, as well as reducing or waiving taxes for a period of at least six months. Of course, this can be done selectively, with a percentage of the contributions paid in the last three years. Thus, the state would make an investment in the companies that have contributed and have the chance to continue contributing.

³ Foaia de parcurs europeană comună către ridicarea măsurilor de limitare a răspândirii COVID-19, JO C 126, 17.4.2020.

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