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КАЗАХСКИЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ИМЕНИ АЛЬ-ФАРАБИ
AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

ГЕОГРАФИЯ ЖӘНЕ ТАБИҒАТТЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ ФАКУЛЬТЕТІ
ФАКУЛЬТЕТ ГЕОГРАФИИ И ПРИРОДОПОЛЬЗОВАНИЯ
FACULTY OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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МАТЕРИАЛДАРЫ
Алматы, Қазақстан, 6-9 сәуір 2020 жыл

МАТЕРИАЛЫ
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MATERIALS
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АДАМ ТІРШІЛІК ҚАУІПСІЗДІГІ
БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬ ЖИЗНЕДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ЧЕЛОВЕКА
HUMAN LIFE SAFETY

ТУРИЗМ ЖӘНЕ ҚОНАҚЖАЙЛЫЛЫҚ СЕКЦИЯСЫ
СЕКЦИЯ ТУРИЗМ И ГОСТЕПРИИМСТВО
SECTION TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

ТУРИЗМ
ТУРИЗМ
TOURISM

IMPACT AND ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MODERN TOURISM SECTOR

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Abstract. The growing role of social media in modern tourism is becoming an increasingly relevant research topic. Social media plays an important role in many aspects of tourism, especially in finding information and making decisions, promoting tourism, and focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers. Using social media to promote tourist products to market has proven to be an excellent strategy. However, the niche of research on use of social media in tourism industry is almost empty. In this regard, this study examines the impact and role of social media sites on development of modern tourism sector.

Introduction

The development of ICT has had a significant impact on hospitality and tourism industry. A wide range of publications are devoted to the fundamental transformation of hospitality and tourism industry under development of information and communication technologies (ICT). ICTs change products, processes, industry structure, and nature of competition.

Tourism services cannot be displayed or analyzed physically before purchasing, they are purchased in advance and away from the place of consumption. These services depend solely on descriptions and representations of travel agencies attracted by tourists. Therefore, accurate and timely information that meets the needs of consumers is often vital to meet tourist demand. Information is therefore crucial in the tourism and travel industry, and the use of ICT is therefore important. Modern consumers are more sophisticated, demanding, and knowledgeable, and because they are increasingly familiar with emerging technologies, they need a specialized, flexible, accessible, and interactive product and effective communication [1]. Therefore, travel companies must implement innovative methods to become more competitive.

Source data and research methods

Source data. The theoretical and methodological basis of the research was the fundamental and applied research works of foreign scientists in the field of tourism and social media, materials of scientific and periodical press, and Internet resources. Other sources are the scientific works of Buhalis D., Pan B., Xiang Z., Kaplan A., Scott S., Vermeulen I., Bickart B., Novikov V. S. and others.

Research methods. Research is based on general scientific and special methods that take into account the specifics of the problem. Analysis and systematization are applied from general scientific methods. The category of private methods includes the formation of general and sample populations, structural and functional, computer technologies for processing and presenting information, graphical methods for presenting information, and analytical research methods. In addition, to create and use tools for analyzing the tourist role of social media, it is essential to choose the methodological basis of study and clarify terminology issues. Speaking about methodological basis, it should be noted that it is very important to understand the nature of social networks as the basis for functioning of social media, new media, and for implementation of educational and research projects in this new, not fully researched and constantly evolving environment.

Results and discussion

Tourism is constantly adapting to technological innovations. These adaptations are reflected in three main areas of technological development that have created ICT in tourism industry: computer reservation systems (CRS), which appeared in the 70s, global distribution systems (GDS), which were developed in the 80s, and the Internet in the 90s. Despite the fact that these technologies appeared with 10-year gaps, they currently operate both jointly and separately [1].

The world wide web has emerged as the fastest growing area of the Internet since 1990. The second generation of the Internet, and hence the advent of Travel 2.0, combines concept of social media, social networks, and virtual communities and is used in travel and tourism industry [2].

The Internet has changed the way information about travel and tourism is distributed and how tourists plan their trips. Recently, two main trends have appeared on the Internet that highlight changes that can affect tourism system. First of all, social media sites have gained popularity in the use of the Internet by tourists [3]. These social media sites help users share their travel experiences, leave comments and opinions, which in turn serve as a source of information for tourists all over the world. At the same time, consumers get more power in determining production and delivery of information due to wide access to the Internet [4].

Secondly, due to the large amount of information, search has gradually become dominant way for tourists to use the Internet. Thus, search engines have become a powerful interface for accessing travel-related information and play an important role in finding tourists and travel companies.

Just like advent of the Internet and development of ICT, the emergence of social media as new participants in the field of travel information exchange has changed structure of tourism industry. For this reason, knowledge of social media role in the search for tourist information is necessary in order for travel companies to become more competitive.

According to a study conducted by Xiang and Gretzel [4], social media plays an important role in tourism industry, accounting for about 11 % of travel and tourism search results associated with Google search. The main platforms for online tourists to share their experiences are virtual communities, consumer review sites, and blogs.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) recognizes the important role of social media in tourism. Tourists and businessmen use smartphones and tablets to find information or share opinions about their place of stay. A study by world Travel Monitor conducted by UNWTO [5] showed that 40 % of international tourists travel with smartphones that have access to the Internet and e-mail among other convenient features; 40 % of smartphone users use them to get information about their destination; 26 % of tourists and 34 % of business travelers need smartphones to change their hotel reservations and other services during their trip. More than a third of international travelers use their smartphones to access social networks – they post content on their blogs, Facebook pages, and share photos on Twitter or Flickr while they are on a trip.

The transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 technology was a major technological breakthrough in formation of social media. While the functionality of Web 1.0 for hospitality and tourism industry was limited to the ability to book flights, hotel rooms, and so on, the advent of Web 2.0 significantly expanded capabilities of users and actually defined a breakthrough in development of social media. Web 2.0 is a set of tools and applications that give consumers, individually or as part of a virtual group, access to the global "word-of-mouthforces". In fact, the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 means a radical expansion of the Internet user's capabilities: from passive consumption of information to its dissemination and, moreover, to a collective model of content creation, including in tourism industry. Accordingly, one of the definitions of social media is formulated as "Social media – a group of Internet applications based on Web 2.0 that allow consumers to create and share content" [6].

Currently, the Internet plays an important role in process of planning tourist trips, the growth of UGC is increasingly affecting the decision-making of tourists, and the behavior and reviews of tourists are becoming more common [7]. According to experts, online reviews significantly impact the purchase of online purchases by more than 10 billion US dollars per year [8], compared with professional reviews [9].

Merging the growing demands for transparency and accountability with the expansion of user content (UGC) and social media creates an influential combination. The visibility given to ranking processes is enhanced in the context of social media sites, as they simultaneously increase the degree to which information is ranked and the speed at which information is ranked, since websites are global and available almost all day, so users can contribute on a continuous basis.

Before online travel communities and travel rating sites such as Tripadvisor became popular, official agencies such as national tourist boards or travel guides controlled the rating and ranking process in the travel industry, which was aligned with an internationally coordinated system of standards. Now, reviews in Tripadvisor reflect the personal opinion of travelers about their experience and can appear within a day after a stay at hotel. Although Tripadvisor requires reviewers to rate the same categories (cost, rooms, service, cleanliness, and location), the value of a traveler's rating is subjective, which creates "value" for a particular traveler, perhaps not the same for another.

Presenting online verification in social media changes the configuration and reallocates accountability relationships in travel and tourism industry. Prior to Tripadvisor, hotel managers were responsible for themselves, their guests, and the rating agencies that periodically visited the hotel. With the advent of Tripadvisor, hotel managers have lost control they previously had, thanks to the means, deadlines, and forms of responsibility that are now set by disparate, anonymous, and dynamic reviews that are often posted on website. As online travel reviews have a significant impact on travel companies, the attitude to reporting has also changed. There are some cases where reviews can mean the difference between profit and cost for these travel and hotel businesses; hotel owners are beginning to recognize the importance of Tripadvisor reviews for their business and are beginning to implement them in their management methods [7].

Current research on the role of social media at the present stage is due to the rapid growth of their influence, including in modern tourism industry. Most users talk about the positive effect of Internet communications.

The modern tourism industry is not far behind. 25 % of travelers actively use social media in the context of tourist information.

According to the World Travel Monitor study presented at the ITB Berlin international exhibition, the main driver of tourist travel growth today is the Internet and related formats and technologies, primarily social media. This is especially true for a young active audience who book their trips using smartphones and other mobile gadgets. In the World Travel Monitor sample, there were almost 500 thousand respondents-travelers from 60 countries of the world. According to the study, the influence of social media – social networks, travel blogs and forums – is growing every year. More than 25 % of respondents said that social networks influence their opinion when choosing a place and type of residence. More than 75% of respondents named social channels as the main source of tourist information. The choice of potential tourists is influenced by stories, vivid photos, reviews, and other content initiated by other users. At the same time, almost 50 % of the survey participants trust the stories and reviews of other travelers. Only one in three travelers when choosing a tour or destination generally avoid social networks, and rely on the recommendations of travel agencies. As a rule, these are older people. The study's findings also note that this year the topic of travel safety has become a key one: 25 % of respondents said that this year they will only go to safe countries. World Travel Monitor predicts that the number of international trips will grow by 3 % worldwide this year [10].

Social media accompanies users from the moment of travel advice, during the trip and after it. When planning a trip, after consulting with social media, more than a third of users change their choice of hotel, 15 % – airline, and the same number – agent / operator, 12 % – destination country (figure 1). Social media is becoming a powerful marketing and branding tool that allows us to track, adjust, change, and create information about an individual company, region, or country, and keep in touch with customers. That is why today no company, especially in such a dynamic industry as the modern tourism industry, can ignore them [11].
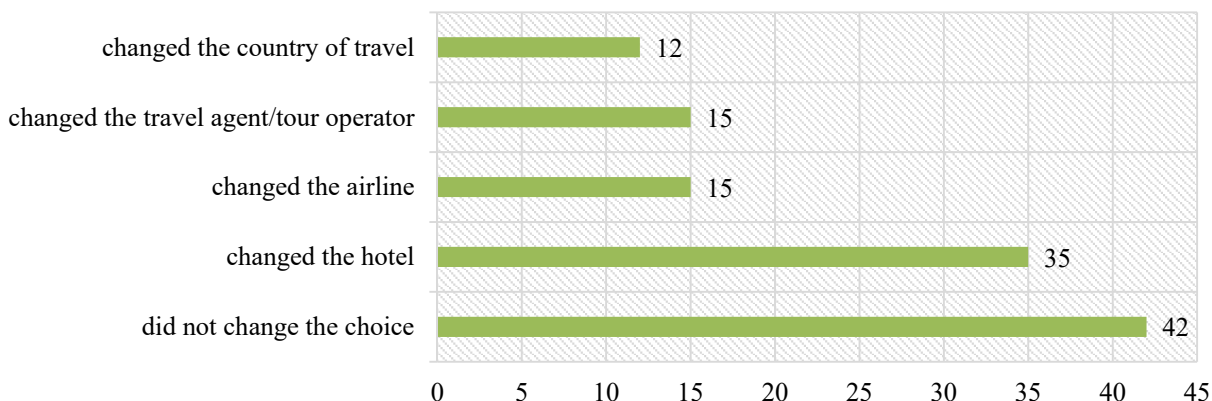

Fig. 1 – Travel planning after consultation on the expanses of social media [11]

The representation of the tour operator in the most popular social media can be called a business card of the company. With the right approach to their promotion, they can become, if not the main, then one of the most important sources for attracting a professional audience, which will ensure the growth of sales of tourist products to end customers [12].

Over the past decade, social media has grown from what looked like a temporary craze to a key component of the Internet. Their influence has increased and affected all B2B and B2C industries, especially tourism.

Conclusion

As for the prospects of the SMM market, experts agree that this is for a long time. From year to year heard arguments about how much is still left social networks, but visible positive dynamics of growth of Internet users, thus says the increase created a page in Facebook or Classmates. Undoubtedly, everything is changing, new social networks are appearing, some are losing ground, users are changing their preferences, but, nevertheless, everyone remains online.

It is obvious that social media in Kazakhstan, especially in the field of tourism, is a channel of great opportunities that has not yet fully revealed its potential. But in times of crisis, it can become the optimal territory for conducting tourist business and be used as an effective and profitable tool for marketing communications.

Kazakhstani tourist companies do not pay attention to the company's history, do not tell about their values, do not bring customers closer to the company, the communication strategy in social networks is either poorly developed or absent.

As the experience of travel companies in the CIS and Western countries shows, social media can be a very useful PR and marketing tool. Firstly, working with clients through social media can increase loyalty to the company, improve customer service, and become an additional channel that helps call centers of the travel company. Secondly, social networks can help travel companies (including hotels) sell additional services to their customers, especially services. Thirdly, social media is a powerful communication and PR channel. Social media can help build trust in an enterprise and improve its reputation [13]. The process of working in social media is inevitable and tourist companies will have to visit this site sooner or later. It is better to take the initiative in this direction now, while the competition in this space is not so acute

In conclusion, it can be noted that nowadays social media is the most important tool that has a strategic impact on tourism sector.

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