

New trends in tourism: Heritage and social media

Rejla Bozdo

Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, Albania.

Email: reilaboardo@yahoo.com.

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Abstract. According to OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016, consumer trends are changing the tourism landscape. According to this study, trips are becoming shorter and people are searching for more unique, personalized experiences in alternative destinations. The growing demand for unusual experiences can bring into focus cultural heritage as an important part of this experience. This paper aims to give an insight on how nations, countries, regions or cities can communicate their cultural heritage mixed with other touristic elements to attract tourists by fulfilling the needs of having a unique experience. Cultural heritage can be promoted through social media, which is now very popular all over the world. Social media plays an important role in information search, decision-making behaviors, and tourism promotion and so business in tourism industry use social media to communicate to potential tourists with objectives that consider this role. According to Global Web Index (GWI) as one of the most reliable research sources of social media statistics social media market is growing each year. Comparing to year 2016 active social media users have been increased by 21%. Specific data on social media usage give a better understanding how people behave on social networks and can help tourism industry to develop a successful communication strategy. It is of great importance to create attraction and interaction. Through social networks, people can become great promoters of the places they visit, or of the places they live. They can share their experiences and recommend places by impacting their friends with no cost for the business and high level of reliability because as we know “people trust friends”. This paper is based on secondary data and its main goal is to give a landscape of the increasingly important role that social media is playing in many aspects of tourism, and also in communicating cultural heritage. The main goal of this paper is to give data that support the idea that social media can be used in a proper way that follows new touristic trends.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook, Internet, tourism, communication, heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism continues to play an important role in countries economic activity. In OECD countries it directly contributes 4.1% of GDP. OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016, published biennially analyses tourism performance and major policy trends in OECD countries, shows that Europe remains the world's most visited region and continues to lead growth in absolute terms (Figure 1). According to OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016, consumer trends are changing the tourism landscape; trips are becoming shorter and people are searching for more unique, personalized experiences in alternative destinations. Considering these trends, cultural and heritage tourism may be a potential

alternative to fulfill the need for customers' unique experience. According to OECD publication in 2009, “*The Impact of Culture in Tourism*”, cultural tourism, since 2009, was one of the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. Culture and creative industries were increasingly being used to promote destinations and enhance their competitiveness and attractiveness. Many locations were at that time actively developing their tangible and intangible cultural assets as a means of developing comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive tourism marketplace, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalization.

Tourism and culture have always been closely linked

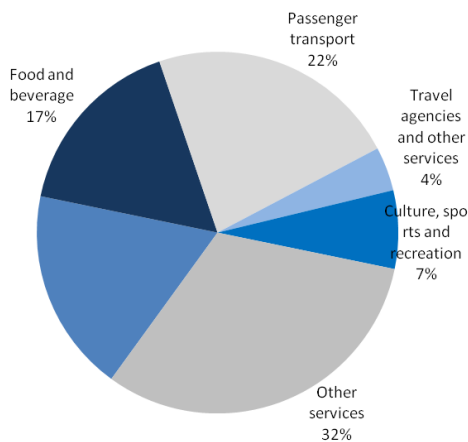


Figure 1. Data from OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016, for the Internal tourism consumption by product, selected OECD countries, 2014 or latest year available, show that Culture, sports and recreation are 7% of the total structure in "Tourism consumption by product". Source: OECD Tourism Statistics (Database).

in Europe. Europe has always been an important destination for those attracted by its rich cultural and historic legacy (Greg, 1996).

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM DEFINITIONS

The terms "culture" and "heritage" are being used often interchangeably. A review of existing definitions of heritage and cultural tourism shows that the terms 'cultural tourism' and 'heritage tourism' have been used to describe not only the consumption of art, monuments, folklore, or in other words, built heritage and cultural manifestations, but also to describe experiences pursued and motivations of travelers at destinations (Aurkene *et al.*, 1998). The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as "travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past," and cultural heritage tourism is defined as "travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present". It is interesting to highlight the definitions used by the Heritage Council of Western Australia in partnership with Tourism Western Australia (2006) in "A heritage tourism strategy for Western Australia":

Heritage tourism: Sustainable tourism activity that is, or can be, aligned to physical or intangible heritage.

Physical heritage: Including but not limited to build structures and surrounds; cultural landscapes; historic sites, areas and precincts; ruins, archaeological and

maritime sites; sites associated with mining, industrial, scientific and agricultural heritage; sites of important events and commemorations; collections that house or collectively promote objects of heritage significance (eg. National Trust attractions, museums, tours, trails and festivals) and created landscapes (eg. botanic and public gardens).

Intangible heritage: Including but not limited to oral traditions, languages, rituals and beliefs, social practices, knowledge, human activities, multicultural interactions, events and festivals, and stories and histories that shape the essence and character of Western Australia and Western Australians.

According to Janos (2012), heritage tourism is one type of cultural tourism that includes the following tourism products and activities: a) Natural and cultural heritage (very much connected to nature-based or ecotourism); b) Material (built heritage, architectural sites, world heritage sites, national and historical memorials), c) Non material (literature, arts, folklore), d) Cultural heritage sites (museums, collections, libraries, theatres, event locations, memories connected to historical persons).

SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINITIONS, SHARE AND GROWTH

Even though there is no single definition, all authors agree on the same characteristics. Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that Social Media is "Online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers intent on educating each-other". Barkan (2009) emphasizes that Social Media is "a collection of internet-based applications that enable peer to peer communication and sharing of information". Campbell (2009) indicates social media as "a type of website, application or communication vehicle where people connect to one another; discuss and interact; share content and ideas; and build relationships." Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)". AMA (American Marketing Association) definition on social media is "Sites where users actively participate to determine what is popular."

The most popular social networks have been changing over time towards one brand taking advantage on the others.

According to Global Web Index (GWI) as one of the most reliable research sources of social media statistics to compare consumer use and engagement across different social network there are globally (published on January 2017):

- 3.773 billion internet users, 50% penetration rate

- 2.789 billion active social media users, 37% penetration rate
- 2.549 billion active mobile social users

It is clear from the charts that social media market is growing each year. Comparing to year 2016 active social media users have been increased by 21%, while internet users increased by 10% and active mobile social users increased by 30%.

According to a compilation prepared by Statista (2017) the most famous social network site worldwide as of August 2017 is Facebook with 2.047 million users. Statista (2016) reported on the most popular social networks worldwide, with over 1,870 million active users, Facebook held an 18% market share, 7% more so than its closest competitor, the Facebook-owned, WhatsApp.

Due to a constant presence in the lives of their users, social networks have a decidedly strong social impact. The blurring between offline and virtual life as well as the concept of digital identity and online social interactions are some of the aspects that have emerged in recent discussions.

According to PEW Research Center (2016), among US users, Facebook is also retaining a huge lead on the competition. It actually increased its penetration to 89% of US internet users, whilst Facebook-owned Instagram came 2nd with 32% penetration.

According to comScore on the audience engagement, Facebook is dominant. Facebook's dominates extraordinarily by not just taking the top spot, but its other platforms also take 2nd and 3rd respectively. Facebook Messenger has a 47% penetration, and Instagram (also owned by Facebook) comes 2nd for engagement.

In this recent chart from Pew Internet below, we can see in terms of active daily use Facebook is also in the lead. 76% of users log in daily, whilst 51% do for Instagram (owned by Facebook). Twitter manages just 42% of users login in daily, only just over half the Facebook figure.

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND TOURISM IN ALBANIA

It is impressive how the communication world has changed last decade and the trends are in favor of digital media also in the upcoming years. Every marketer that needs to reach the new generation has now discovered the place: social media. And this is not just a matter of audience; social media applications make experiences so interactive that anyone anywhere can become a tourism promoter.

Key data for social media in Albania

Internet penetration in Albania started during year 2000. The data from Internet World Stats (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/euro/al.htm>) show that

the internet usage rate in Albania has increased rapidly in the last 10 years, starting at 0.1% in 2000 and reaching the usage of 43.5% of all population in 2010. Only during the year 2009-2010 this rate was doubled. And in 2013 compared to 2010 it has been increased from 43.5 to 60.1%. As of March 2017, data shows that internet users are 1,916,233 from a total population of 2,911,428 inhabitants, 65.8% internet penetration rate and 48.1% Facebook penetration rate. According to statsmonkey.com (2017), 96.76% of social media users, are Facebook users, 2.81% are Twitter users and the other social platforms have less than 1% share.

In Albania people are familiar with: *Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, Pinterest, etc.*

Key data for tourism in Albania

According to WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council), the direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was ALL 127.2 bn (USD 1.0 bn), 8.4% of total GDP in 2016 (Figure 2). The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was ALL 393.3 bn (USD 3.2 bn), 26% in 2016. WTTC forecast for Albania 2017-2027, is to improve the world ranking among 185 countries, by moving from 96th rank in 2016 to 26th in 2027 regarding growth statistics.

Visitor exports are a key component of the direct contribution of Travel and Tourism. In 2016, Albania generated ALL219.1bn in visitor exports. The WTTC report gives a clear picture of the actual situation of Albania compared to other countries in the region (Figure 3).

Analyzing this chart, it is clear that Albania has much to do in developing Travel and Tourism Sector. While, leisure travel spending (inbound and domestic) generated 70.1% of direct Travel and Tourism GDP in 2016 (ALL208.1bn) compared with 29.9% for business travel spending (ALL88.9bn); domestic travel spending generated 26.2% of direct Travel and Tourism GDP in 2016 compared with 73.8% for visitor exports (ie foreign visitor spending or international tourism receipts).

Albania's characteristics as a post-communist country, a European destination, with interesting cultural heritage where western and eastern past has mixed through centuries, can offer that unique experience that today's tourist are searching for. Tourism and culture have always been closely linked in Europe. Europe has always been an important destination for those attracted by its rich cultural and historic legacy (Greg, 1996). In the World Heritage list, UNSECO, Albania has 3 registered cites, form a total of 1073 cites by October 2017; among which 506 sites are located in Europe. The country has also other heritage from the past including the communist regime during which Albanians lived isolated form 50 years. Social media usage has made communication so global and has transferred a lot of marketing power to the people. The big question is how to involve people to communicate their beautiful experience in Albania and

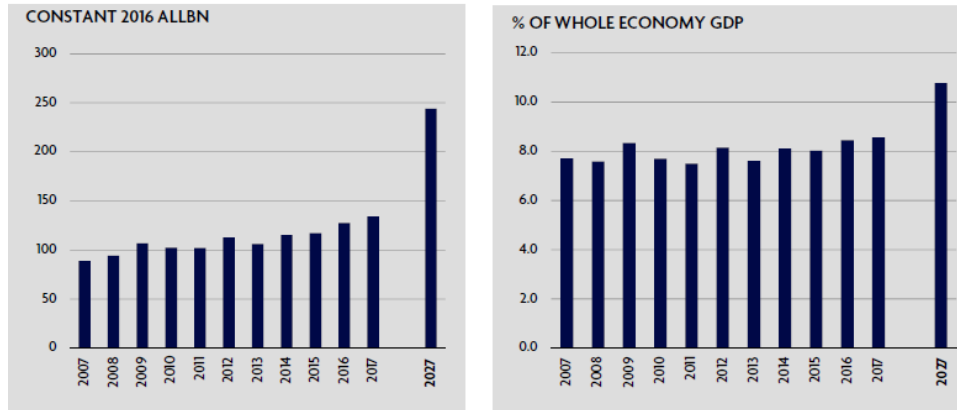


Figure 2. Albania: Direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP. Source: World Travel and Tourism Council, "Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017, Albania".

| TRAVEL & TOURISM'S DIRECT CONTRIBUTION TO GDP | | 2016 (US\$bn) | TRAVEL & TOURISM'S TOTAL CONTRIBUTION TO GDP | | 2016 (US\$bn) |
|---|--------------------|---------------|--|--------------------|---------------|
| 7 | Italy | 86.2 | 8 | Italy | 207.6 |
| 14 | Turkey | 29.1 | 14 | Turkey | 88.0 |
| World Average | | 19.1 | World Average | | 57.3 |
| 26 | Greece | 14.7 | 29 | Greece | 36.6 |
| 53 | Croatia | 5.4 | Other Europe Average | | 17.4 |
| Other Europe Average | | 5.3 | 54 | Czech Republic | 15.0 |
| 57 | Czech Republic | 4.9 | 57 | Croatia | 12.5 |
| 83 | Bulgaria | 1.8 | 73 | Bulgaria | 6.6 |
| 89 | Cyprus | 1.4 | 89 | Cyprus | 4.3 |
| 105 | Albania | 1.0 | 96 | Albania | 3.2 |
| 132 | Montenegro | 0.5 | 128 | Bosnia-Herzegovina | 1.5 |
| 136 | Bosnia-Herzegovina | 0.4 | 145 | Montenegro | 0.9 |

Figure 3. Country Rankings. Absolute Contribution, 2016. Source: World Travel and Tourism Council, "Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017, Albania".

how to make the inhabitants of the cities with cultural heritage and touristic destinations to become the ones that invite tourist through their everyday online communication? Albania is actually moving through this path. There are a lot of best practices over the world referring to social media engagement for all types of tourisms. Below we bring in focus the case of Tourism Australia.

BEST PRACTICE FROM TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Social Media marketing communication for Australia is a specific success story. The strategy is based on innovative content. The Tourism Australia social media team decided to use the fact that Australia is a naturally scenic destination and this scenery is foremost conveyed via images. Fans post photos with the understanding that Tourism Australia may use these images for promotion. This made the content on social media, user-generated content. Word of mouth on this experience increased the number of loyal fans and highly engaged fans. By

promoting the destination by a fan photo shoot, the fans became brand ambassadors. Turning over their Facebook page to the fans was their single biggest turning point, resulting in massive levels of engagement. A single photo may get thousands of likes, shares, and comments and gives the photographers (both amateur and professional) a chance to showcase their work, and the fans to share their holiday pics. Social sharing is a key part of Tourism Australia’s strategy. When fans share images, they are also reaching out to their network of friends and saying “look, we’ve done this and you can too”, thus extending the reach and virality of each story. The strategy itself is using content to shape visitors’ perceptions. The strategy is based on pillars activity. Aquatic & Coastal, Restaurant Australia and Nature and Wildlife pillars represent a large segment of this activity. One of the strategic success factor is that Tourism Australia started the social media campaign by with engaging tourism industry and Australian residents. If that is not possible then there’s very little chance to be able to engage visitors. For them, over 90% of content submissions come from locals. It is always their preference

to elevate local stories rather than those created by a visitor who is just passing through. Tourism Australia are global leaders in social media destination marketing. They have reached almost 8 million fans registered in Australia Facebook page by September 2017. Tourism Australia is the Australian Government agency responsible for attracting international visitors to Australia, both for leisure and business events. They are active in 17 international markets, promoting unique attributes which will entice people to visit and targeting people who research indicates will spend more and travel most widely through the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism continues to play an important role in countries economic activity. In OECD countries it directly contributes 4.1% of GDP. OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2016, published biennially analyses tourism performance and major policy trends in OECD countries, show that Europe remains the world's most visited region and continues to lead growth in absolute terms. Europe has always been an important destination for those attracted by its rich cultural and historic legacy (Richards, 1996). At this point cultural heritage of a specific country located in Europe, as Albania, can be used as competitive feature in marketing communication strategy of tourism.

At the same time things have changed a lot in the communication world has changed last decade and the trends are in favor of digital media also in the upcoming years. Every marketer that needs to reach the new generation has now discovered the place: social media. And this is not just a matter of audience; social media applications make experiences so interactive that anyone anywhere can become a tourism promoter. Social media plays an important role in information search, decision-making behaviors, and tourism promotion and so business in tourism industry use social media to communicate to potential tourists with objectives that consider this role. According to Global Web Index (GWI) as one of the most reliable research sources of social media statistics social media market is growing each year. Comparing to year 2016 active social media users have been increased by 21%. The National Tourism Strategy of a country should consider social media in also promoting the experience one can get through cultural heritage tourism. Albania's characteristics as a post-communist country, a European destination, with interesting cultural heritage where western and eastern past has mixed through centuries, can offer that unique experience that today's tourists are searching for. Tourism and culture have always been closely linked in Europe. Social media usage has made communication so global and has transferred a lot of marketing power to the people. The big question is how to involve people to

communicate their beautiful experience in Albania and how to make the inhabitants of the cities with cultural heritage and touristic destinations to become the ones that invite tourist through their everyday online communication? The best practice of Tourism Australia highlights the importance in having an innovative strategy of user-generated content by giving a key role to the country's citizen's social media promotion of cultural heritage tourism. The promotion can start from residents and countries' inhabitants. The idea that everyone can be part of country's promotion strategy will offer synergy in country's tourism communication strategy. Today this can be easily done. Social media is there. People are there.

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