

DIGITAL TOURISM: A REVIEW OF TRENDS IN PROMOTING TOURISM ACTIVITIES

Luiza CARAIVAN

***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to present the development of digital tourism not only as a theoretical concept but also as an opportunity for small or medium sized business that are welcoming visitors. It presents the current trends in digital tourism, focusing on digital media and how technology is shaping and informing travel decisions.*

***Keywords:** digital media, tourism, trends*

Digital tourism can be defined in two ways: travelling from here to there without leaving your chair and the way “critical digital tourism studies defines a new cross-disciplinary field where the sociality of virtual tourism interactions is examined (entailing the study of structures, social rules, ideologies, power relations, sustainability dimensions, ethics, and cultural values shaping digital tourism)”. The virtual landscape of tourism is the newest concept of this decade and the former definition has been introduced at the beginning of the 21st century, whereas scholars have been using the latter since 2012. Information technologies are closely related to management and marketing tools, therefore IT studies have been connected to business studies and tourism. At the same time, language has crossed the bridge from being an obstacle in communication to becoming a key ingredient in facilitating communication, ever since English has become an international language. That is why, each person having a small business in the field of tourism had to find a way of promoting their businesses on-line and of understanding the reviews on tourism websites, in an attempt to transform their clients into admirers, fans and, eventually, into unofficial representatives or even ambassadors. Moreover, recent trends influence tourists’ use of technology to discover, outline and arrange their trip or holiday, and finally share their travel experiences.

Thus, encouraging plural research perspectives and a critical approach to studying virtual tourism is essential in understanding how technology influences and changes not only tourism but also the use of English language in the future.

It is a well-known fact that small and medium-sized businesses should tackle with the problems encountered by their customers in order to know them better and to gain more clients. Tourism is big business. More than anything, it’s an ever-increasing market. This is a market that is continually reshaping as

the customer and their technology evolves around it. For brands and tourism-based organisations, to enter this pool of customers requires a strategy that taps into various stages of the customer's decision-making process.

Due to the fact that tourism is a continuously increasing market, it is vital for business owners in this field to learn how to reshape it. As customers use technology as soon as it is released on the market, tourism-based organisations must find a strategy to establish connections with their customers. Such a connection should enable the person responsible with the implementation of technology to have access to customers' opinions and answer their questions or comments as soon as they are posted on-line, so that potential future clients are attracted and not put off by negative comments that remained unanswered.

Consumers are constantly browsing and spending more time on-line than ever before and buying trends are closely related to the digital marketing space.

Thus, digital tourism is no longer strictly defined as spending a vacation in front of your computer, watching films or photos from various places on Earth. It is rather defined as a programme that makes businesses thrive or fail. The question that arises is how small businesses from less-developed countries, with owners that have little knowledge of English could adopt what digital techniques offer the industry in order to help them develop.

Efficiency in the digital world implies to be aware of various aspects that aim at converting fans into real ambassadors. Visitors need to be offered not only unforgettable experiences but also destination awareness.

In this respect, a series of programmes have been launched at the initiative of the European Commission for Tourism that stimulate business owners to adopt mobile technology, "to draw a digital learning roadmap to provide a personalised route to building digital into business operations at all levels of digital awareness, from just starting out online to those who are seasoned digital experts. Regional events and workshops help introduce and optimise the use of digital technology as part of business marketing, from Google Analytics to mobile email marketing and measuring return on investment. And a knowledge hub provides insight and inspiration into how digital technology can help business growth" (<http://www.scottishtourismweek.scot/uploads/Digital-Tourism-Scotland.pdf>).

These programmes have been introduced in many European countries, including Romania and organize regional events and workshops. These events raise awareness of business owners on the usefulness of implementing technology in their business and using digital marketing tools. Boosting competitiveness is just one step towards creating more jobs in small communities that is why digital tourism may be the answer to the numerous questions asked by these communities.

However access to technology is not available to all tourism providers, that is why it is essential to identify traditional tourism providers and connect them with public administrations and technology providers.

Moreover predicting trends in digital tourism is a challenge. Some general tendencies that have been observed for some years now are: creating content, infiltrating the social networks, responding comments on a daily basis, managing online reputation, creating a digital marketing strategy, using the online media.

First of all, paying attention to content and creating content is one of the key ingredients in digital tourism, as quality content must be created for potential visitors: a blog, an article on a website, a picture or a video. Due to the fact that tourists first investigate before making a decision about their travel destination, being present on blogs or specialized websites is an opportunity to answer any questions as quickly as possible and influence their decision. The owner should not focus on services but on visitors' needs, providing the required information. Content is strictly related to the target-group that visits a place and to their interests, preferences and needs.

Secondly, infiltrating the social networks is the latest trend in the second decade of the 21st century. Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor and other online platforms are widely used to promote businesses. "After the user discovers that your services are among the highest rated on Facebook, TripAdvisor or Foursquare, reviews your photos on Instagram and assesses that your hotel is an ideal place for a holiday, they will contact you with specific queries – either privately via email and phone, or in public through comments on the social networks. Your role is to be available, active and accessible in real time. Talk to them, ask them for their opinion and listen to their thoughts because they are the ones that bring life into your tourism business" (<http://www.media-marketing.com/en>).

Thirdly, responding comments on a daily basis is part of managing the online reputation. The new generation uses their phones about 150 times a day to check social networks, look at the time, and search the Internet. That is why content must be adjusted to mobile users.

Finally, it is a well-known fact that that visitors and guests search and investigate before going to a place, so it is important not only to have good reviews or answer negative comments quickly, but also to be different from the competition.

Sometimes, the content is perfect, services are impressive, and communication with customers is fast and faultless. Yet, there are other businesses that have the same characteristics. In order to draw attention to a business and to stand out from the crowd, there are other digital marketing strategies that business owners must take into consideration. Advertising on social networks such as like Facebook, TripAdvisor and Instagram may be done in the form of sponsored posts that look identical to other posts. Although this type of advertising is efficient it also implies higher costs. Due to the fact that users usually check the first five names that appear on their search engines, it may be a good idea to aim at reaching one of those five positions. Last but not least, blogs and vlogs may also make a difference.

In conclusion, digital tourism may be about being creative and easily accessible, responding to clients quickly and being present on online media, but paying too much attention to technology should not affect the attention that visitors and guests deserve on they reach their destinations.

Bibliography

Gyimóthy S., Ana María Munar. 2013. "Critical Digital Tourism Studies" in *Welcoming Encounters: Tourism Research in a Post Disciplinary Era*. ed. William Feighery. [http://vbn.aau.dk/en/publications/critical-digital-tourism-studies\(73fc0a13-8cfd-4025-b8bc-99b5bae40db9\).html](http://vbn.aau.dk/en/publications/critical-digital-tourism-studies(73fc0a13-8cfd-4025-b8bc-99b5bae40db9).html)
https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/conferences-events/digital-tourism_en
<http://www.breconbeaconstourism.org/documents/Digital-Tourism-How-to-Guide.pdf>
<http://www.media-marketing.com/en/news/5-unavoidable-trends-in-digital-tourism-marketing-in-2017/>
<http://www.scottishtourismweek.scot/uploads/Digital-Tourism-Scotland.pdf>

NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Luiza CARAIVAN is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, Tibiscus University, Timisoara. She holds a PhD. in English literature. She is the author of *Writing for Business* (2011) and *The Rhetoric of Otherness in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2016). She has also published numerous articles and studies in journals and magazines from Romania and abroad.