Tourism Industry "prefers" Digital Marketing

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Abstract

Nowadays the digital economy is the base of increased competitiveness, as the digital transformation indicates migrating to new technological models, where **digital marketing** is taking advantage as strategy businesses use for market growth and loyalty. The internet and digital marketing have become important factors in campaigns aiming at not only attracting but retaining digital visitors. This study aims to bring the perception of usefulness of such visitors through the use of digital marketing. Digital technologies can monitor behaviors, can analyze the content of requests, problems, assessments, both on platforms of organizations and on social networks. All businesses need to understand how measuring the impact of such digital activity will result in the outcome that the marketing department needs to achieve in the short run. That exact feature of monitoring the short-term impact makes the difference in strategies based on digital marketing versus traditional marketing.

Keywords: traditional, digital, marketing, marketing system, digital consumers.

Introduction

Online marketing does not differ much from classic marketing, the goal being sales, regardless of the object of sale (products, services, information, etc.). At the same time, this type of marketing has some distinct features, the integration of the new media into the marketing mic, that leads to new concepts, such as: viral marketing (imitates the viral process), viral mobile marketing, transactional marketing, conversational marketing, internet marketing, digital marketing, interactive marketing. All of these being modalities to attract numerous clients with very low costs and presume a good web design, a comprehensive database, links, using interactive promotional materials, development of personal sales, etc. (Coltman, T., 2007). Clients' permission must be required when registering in the virtual shop, to notify them of company offers and promotional messages. With the information burst and the immense changes in the forms such information reach audiences as well as communication technologies implied the concept of digital marketing has managed to synthetize as many activities as possible and efficiently use information systems, specifically ITC application. So, digital marketing, known also as online marketing, cyber marketing, web marketing, e-marketing, i-marketing, electronic marketing, digital marketing of marketing on the internet was born and is thriving as a strategy for certain industries.

Marketing, management, and economics

Marketing is a significant socio-economic activity since ages. A marketing system consists of two main factors: external environmental constraints, and controllable business forces. First: competition; social and ethical environment; technological advancement; the global and economic context appears to be less dynamic than the volatile market demand and distribution structure. Meanwhile, business tries to manipulate company resources related or not directly related to marketing and marketing

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mix components such as product, price structure, promotional activities, and some features of the distribution system. The purpose of the system is to achieve the predetermined objectives of the market and to satisfy the needs of the consumer in a useful way for the company.

Marketing plays a vital role in economic growth in today's global world. It ensures planned economic growth in developing economies where shortages of goods, services, ideas and excessive unemployment do not stimulate consumption. Therefore, marketing efforts are needed for the mobilization of economic resources; for the additional production of ideas, goods and services that result in the stimulation of production and therefore possibly greater employment. Marketing stimulates the total demand thus increasing the size of the market, helps in the distribution of production without which there is no possibility of creating the supply of goods and services, which is the main point for economic growth. It also accelerates the process of strengthening the national currency, which in turn facilitates the transfer of investable resources.

This traditional panorama does not provide the business operating in Niche markets with a secure positioning for its product/service. First the focus of these businesses is narrow – only the product/service or only a few high value customers. Second, the dimensions of market development and timing do not comply with therefore other marketing strategies and channels are to be de developed.

Marketers operating in consumables markets are obliged to create brands, create demand, promote sales, and help their companies gain customer loyalty. But today's turbulent environment means they must play critical new roles: They must be strategists, allocating scarce resources to support business priorities and ensure return on investment; must be familiar with, even experts in information technology, following and capitalizing on the most useful technologies that are flooding their field; and they must be scientists, because the future of their business may not look much like the past (Joshi, 2014).

Usually, marketing decision makers possess knowledge about marketing phenomena, experience with marketing processes in practice, specific knowledge (eg., industry-specific expertise). At the same time, marketing decision makers are also constrained by serious constraints, perhaps the most severe constraint being **the time**. It is known that managerial activity is characterized by brevity, variety, and frequent disruptions, and marketing management isn't an exception. In their daily decision-making, marketing managers have to allocate time to a large number of different problems, which makes it extremely difficult to focus attention on each individual problem. Another limitation is **cognitive ability**. As a human being, a marketing decision maker is able to process only a limited amount of information and consider only a limited number of alternative solutions to a problem at a time. (Gerrit H. van Bruggen, 2010). It is usually not enough for marketing decision makers to simply look at the data because the analysis helps to delve into the causes and events. For example, why do we see a sudden drop in market share in country X?; why is the performance of this new product so far below forecast?

This brings us to the core topic of this issue: marketing management support systems that improve managers' decision-making by improving their efficiency (time saved) as well as their effectiveness (better, faster decisions). An MMSS may contain models that are needed for cause-and-effect analysis, simulations, and optimization. These are the highest levels of functionality of an MMSS. A marketing management support system is not limited to containing only quantitative data. It can also contain qualitative data in the form of knowledge and expertise. (Gerrit H. van Bruggen, Berend Wierenga, 2010).

Traditional Marketing or Digital Marketing?

For many businesses, making the right "marketing" decision is not easy, as marketing can make a big difference to their results. Through digital or traditional marketing, a business can increase revenue.

Traditional marketing is a type of marketing that is hard to ignore and includes the traditional advertisements that we encounter every day. Many of the most common and proven offline marketing tactics are part of everyday life: print (magazines, newspapers, etc.); broadcasting (TV, radio, etc.); direct mail (catalogs, postcards, flyers, etc.) telephone (telemarketing, SMS marketing, etc.)

Traditional marketing may have evolved over the past few decades, but the basic aspects remain the same. The sales techniques we use today rely on product, price, place, and promotion. By utilizing the four P-s of marketing, a business can actually guide its prospects and customers through every sale and have profitable results.

While traditional marketing is still effective, it is not the only way to make the product popular in the target market. Traditional marketing is a one-way path where a business is able to provide information to its target audience about its product or service between previous actions such as market research.

Traditional marketing depends on promotional methods that are planned and difficult to modify quickly. If audience targeting isn't going well, a static ad running in the local newspaper or a TV ad will have to be replaced with a new ad – a process that takes time and the commitment of several decision makers.

Recurring costs in traditional marketing can prove to be a large investment that may or may not yield a good return. The advertisement in the local newspaper will only be effective if it is seen by the target audience on the exact day it is published.

A traditional marketing strategy does not allow accurate measurement of the results obtained after the implementation of the campaign. While online marketing campaigns can easily identify mistakes and successes. This feature alone makes digital marketing much better than its traditional counterpart.

The term digital marketing was first used in the 1990s. In the 2000s and 2010s, digital marketing became more sophisticated as an effective way to create a relationship with the consumer that has depth and relevance (Coltman, T., 2007). Marketing research conducted online is much more cost-effective than the classic one. Negotiation with a website is often done directly by the seller of the product/service thus cutting the cost and the service of an expensive marketing agency. Traditional marketing is normally an intensive process that needs time and expensive input. The classic marketing research takes time, and its statistical errors are hardly corrected whereas the online surveys have are easily exported to specialized software for their analysis, such as SOSS, Quantam, Stata, EViews etc., and the statistical errors is normally lower due to the big number of individual surveyed – the cost is really low so the sample can be enormous.

Traditional marketing is not always available, for example a TV or radio commercial is broadcasted at certain times, while a commercial on a website is available all the time, these being some of the basic attributes of the internet through its infrastructure consist of online servers that are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (Jaworski, BJ, 1993).

Traditional marketing has limited interactivity whereas the online platforms enable each visitor to express his/her likes or dislikes from the comfort of their own environment.

Traditional marketing generally operates locally, while online marketing is global, reducing communication barriers, a website being available in any area of the globe that has access to the internet, while most televisions, radio stations and the print media are only available in a certain geographical area.

The internet can be considered a free market, where consumers can more easily compare prices for certain goods and services offered by companies than in real life. The emerging of online stores and global sites like eBay or Amazon has greatly facilitated the purchase of goods from foreign countries. The limitless use of platforms is changing the labor market as well. Companies in one country promote their services (software companies or websites) to attract employees or contractors, to receive orders from abroad. Digital marketing has standardized the language used and the abbreviation of the marketing message does not require excellent language ability as the visual message overpass the cultural boundaries (language in particular). The advantages of online marketing over traditional marketing are summarized and listed (Orzan, 2007), so we see that online marketing can save money and help reduce the marketing budget, due to the fact that on the Internet the transmission of information from the company to the customer or the potential customer is significantly more profitable.

Understanding the digital consumer in the age of rapid information

Due to improvement in technology consumers are aware of all the products available in the market and can compare these products through available information to them. One of the benefits of adopting digital marketing by the companies is to grab these consumers through getting information about consumers' behavior and habits. Hoge's (1993) idea of internet marketing is simple although it does not touch the important aspect of customer relationship. Strauss and Ansary (2006) defined internet marketing in their latest book as the use of information technology in the process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers, and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stake holders. According to Stuart E. J. (2014) day by day there is upward growth of online services in regular usages by consumers. However, traditional marketers somehow do not want to admit that the world has changed. They are slow in taking advantage of new opportunities presented to them. Dave Chaffey (2002) defines internet marketing as "Applying Digital technologies which form online channels (Web, e-mail, databases, plus mobile/wireless & digital TV) to contribute to marketing activities aimed at achieving profitable acquisition and retention of customers (within a multi-channel buying process and customer lifecycle) through improving our customer knowledge (of their profiles, behavior, value and loyalty drivers), then delivering integrated targeted communications and online services that match their individual needs."

The first thing to understand about digital consumers is that there is essentially no such thing. "There's no great mystery about how [digital consumers] think and what they want," says interactive marketing expert Giles Rhys Jones of Interactive Marketing Trends (http://interactivemarketing.blogspot.com). These consumers are doing exactly what people have been doing for thousands of years - communicating with each other. All consumers care about the experience—how the marketing available to them can enhance the experience and help them make more informed decisions. People are the single most important element in any form of marketing. This is as true in the digital space as it is in any other sphere of life. That said, much research work has been (and continues to be) done on online consumer behavioral traits, and a broad consensus has emerged around the key characteristics that digital consumers embody:

• Digital consumers are increasingly comfortable with the tool: Many online consumers have been using the Internet for several years at this stage - and, while the user demographic is still skewed in favor of the young, even older users are becoming and more knowledgeable and web users. As people become more comfortable with the medium, they use it more efficiently and effectively, which means they don't stick around for long: your content has to deliver what they want, and it has to deliver quickly.

• They want it all, and they want it now: Their time is a precious commodity, so they want information in a format they can scan for relevance before investing time in reviewing the details. Designers and marketers must adapt to this desire for 'scannability' and instant gratification when building their online offering.

• They are in control: The Web is not a passive medium. Users are in control - in the world of Web 2.0 more than ever before.

• They are unpredictable: The transparency and immediacy of the Internet does not eliminate the concept of brand or vendor loyalty, but it erodes it. Building trust in a brand is still an essential element of digital marketing, but today's consumers have the power to compare and contrast competing brands literally at their fingertips.

• They are vocal: Online consumers talk to each other - a lot. Through peer reviews, blogs, social networks, forums and online communities they are telling each other about their positive - and negative - online experiences. From a marketing perspective this is something of a double-edged sword.

Whether the business creates more synergy with digital marketing depends a lot on the nature of the business. If, a group of women farmers in a remote area, have a fixed contract to supply the specialized store of Bio products in a neighborhood of a big city market

(Tirana), if they do not have a long-term plan for these specific products and the ambition to diversify and grow the business supported by a project, then digital marketing may not be the best solution. Traditional marketing in this case will create an offer more formatted according to the customer. There are really very few businesses today that can't benefit from at least some degree of digital marketing - even if it's just providing basic information online and sending occasional updates to existing customers via email or RSS. (Really Simple Syndication - a way to pull updated posts or articles from a website automatically).

But the customers of these products are online or will be online shortly. So digital marketing does not remain a B lane but moves to the first place.

Second, are the products, services, or brands suitable for digital marketing? This can be tricky - but the answer is usually yes. It usually doesn't matter what the product, service or brand is: as long as there is a potential online audience for it then online promotion becomes mandatory. Consumers go online to research, evaluate, and compare their choices. They make purchasing decisions based on the quality of their online experience and then head to a brick-and-mortar store to hand over their cash. Boats, cars, houses, apartments, horses, tractors, all are being actively and successfully marketed online.

Third, can some extra costs be avoided (consumer perception of the leisure industry) and expand the possibility of exploring all alternatives according to deeply specified requirements? Some service sectors have been forced to move away from traditional marketing and focus their information and sales campaigns massively on digital marketing to offer products/services of this industry. This encourages different ad formatting; its adaptation to search engines and search engine optimization (SEO); strong customer engagement strategies; content marketing; use of modern advertising techniques; diversification of employees' knowledge.

The problem that digital marketing can solve in the tourism industry

The tourism industry, one of the largest sectors globally, is an essential component of the social and economic activity of many countries as it generates jobs, income for businesses and governments and growth opportunities. The tourism industry is constantly growing every year, reaching 1.19 billion tourists in 2015, from 528 million in 2005, while it is expected to grow to even more than 1.8 billion by 2030.

In 2021 statistics show that the tourism industry contributed directly by creating millions of jobs worldwide. The idea that the tourism and travel industry can be very beneficial for a country has led to the necessity of making tourist destinations as attractive as possible, both for one-time travelers and for experiencers.

As the tourism industry grows, we are witnessing an era of radical evolution of software ecosystems that allow access to an abundance of tourist-related data (Kontogianni & Alepis, 2020). Developing the smart systems, it is important to know since the tourist product offered incudes such elements as: accommodation, food and beverage facilities, cultural heritage points of interest, attractions or transport, etc. (Niedbała et al., 2020).

Albania enjoys a great tourism potential due to the geographical position in which it is located, the natural and climate richness as well as many historical and cultural aspects that are intertwined in it. For these reasons, our country has been classified in recent years by the international travel agencies as one of the most interesting tourist destinations in the world. Given that tourism is one of the most important industries in the social and economic aspects of a country, its development should be of great significance.

Albania has seen significant growth in tourism over the past decade, with a surge in visitor numbers and an increase in tourism revenue. Here are some figures to illustrate tourism development in Albania for the last 10 years:

a. *In 2011, Albania welcomed around 3 million visitors. By 2019, this number had risen to over 6.4 million visitors, marking a 113% increase in 8 years.*

b. *The tourism sector in Albania has grown steadily over the last decade, with an average annual growth rate of 7% in international tourist arrivals.*

c. *Tourism revenue has also increased significantly in Albania over the past decade. In 2011, the total tourism revenue was estimated at around 814 million euros. By 2019, this figure had almost tripled to 2.3 billion euros.*

d.   *The number of hotels and other accommodation facilities has also increased in Albania, with a 37% increase in the number of hotels between 2011 and 2019.*

e.   *The top five source markets for tourism in Albania are Italy, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Greece, and Montenegro.*

f.   *The Albanian government has made significant efforts to develop the tourism industry in the country, with initiatives such as the National Tourism Strategy 2019-2023, which aims to increase visitor numbers and improve the quality of tourism services.*

Tourist operators have increasingly embraced digital marketing strategies to reach and engage with potential travelers. They have focused on creating user-friendly websites that provide relevant information about their services, destinations, and attractions. They optimize their websites for search engines to improve visibility in search results ; leveraged popular social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to showcase their destinations, share engaging content, and interact with their target audience; collaborated batter with influencers and travel bloggers who have a significant online following; produced blog posts, articles, and travel guides to provide valuable information, tips, and insights to potential travelers; utilized online advertising platforms like Google Ads, Facebook Ads, and Instagram Ads to reach a wider audience; integrated online booking systems into their websites, allowing travelers to conveniently book their services.

By utilizing these digital marketing strategies, tourist operators can effectively reach their target audience, build brand awareness, and drive bookings. They can track and analyze digital marketing campaigns' performance, allowing them to refine their strategies and optimize their marketing efforts for better results.

Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this study. First, the study selection, research philosophy, research purpose, research approach and research strategy are presented. Then, the data collection method that provides information on how to collect the resources is explained. Finally, the validity and reliability of our research is explained.

The use of online forms of marketing in tourist agencies is a very interesting topic, so it aroused interest to carry out this paper. Online promotional campaigns carried out by national and international agencies have been quite successful, so this practice has been used by many such companies in the last decade in many countries of the world. Given that information technology has had a massive development and spread, this massism has also affected the Albanian society where young people and not only are regular users of social networks and digital forms. The trend of marketing through digital forms was also applied in Albania, where all agencies, part of the tourist services market, aim to increase their influence through digital communication, promoting the packages they offer, etc.

In this paper, we have studied the impact of this form of promotion on the selection made by citizens. The method of data collection for this work is presented in the sessions that follow in this chapter.

The methodology used is mainly explanatory and descriptive in the second chapter where we have the literature review, and quantitative methodology in the fourth chapter where we have the analysis of the findings and the results of the conducted survey. The research strategy is deductive, where first the research question and related hypotheses are presented, then the theoretical approach and its validation through the conducted survey.

Data Collection

The primary data for the development of this study were collected through a survey conducted with a group of 100 young people, aged 18-25, in Tirana to assess the impact of online promotion on respondents. The reason for targeting is because these constitute the group with innovative views, oriented towards technology and the age group that is highly influenced by the price change. Which means that since they are sensitive to "finding the best offer" they are more predisposed to look for different alternatives in search

engines. This allows us to target this target group. The survey was carried out through google forms, where the results of the answers were aggregated at the end.

Further, by means of the excel program, graphs were built and the answers to the questionnaires were interpreted through pie charts or other charts used for the presentation and interpretation of data.

The secondary data were collected through the review of the literature, the study of scientific articles, the analysis of the conclusions drawn by scientific researchers in this field which have supported and adapted to the chosen topic. The methodology chosen in the processing of these data is descriptive, analytical and explanatory.

Based on the responses of the interviewees, we conclude on the validation or not of the hypothesis raised at the beginning.

### Data Analysis/Survey Results

1. What is your Gender?

The first question on the impact of online marketing on social media aims to classify the respondents based on their gender. This will assit the analysts for assesing the comsumers' segments.
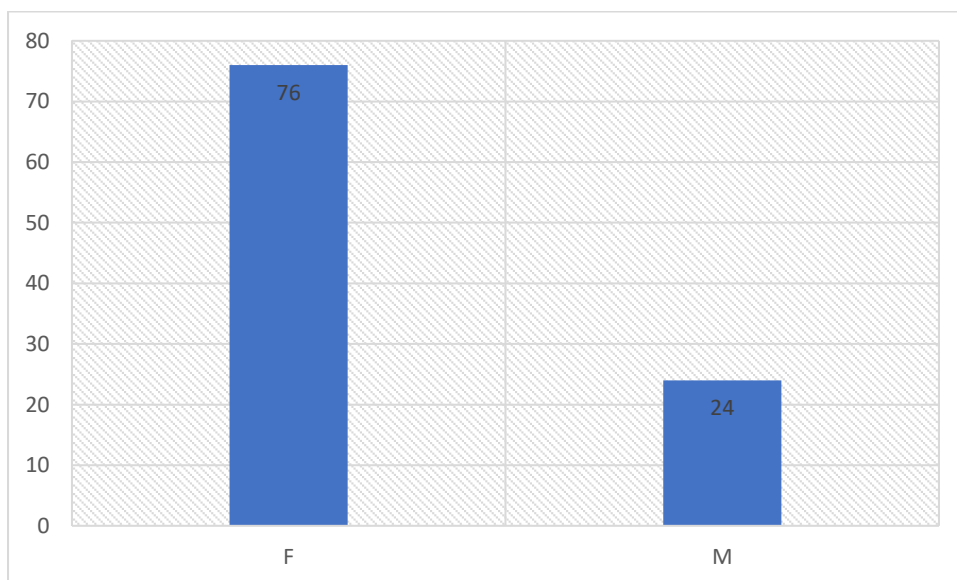
Based on the results of the survey, it appears that about 76% of respondents out of 100 respondents are women and 24% are men.

*2. How active are you on social networks, how many hours a day do you spend on them?*

The second question will help in estimating time spent browsing the Internet, but mostly in social media.
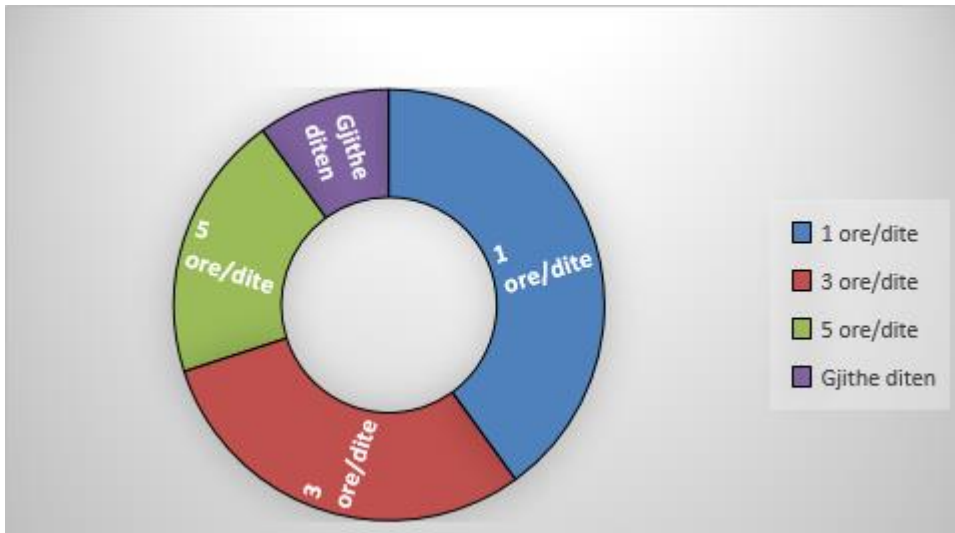
To the question of how many hours a day they devote to social networks, for the search for the best services offered by different tourist agencies, seems that most of them spend a considerable time in the search for the best services. 40% of respondents spend 1 hour/day, 30% spend 3 hours, 20% spend 5 hours and the rest spend all their time on social networks.

*3. Which social networks are the most frequented by you?*

The next question aims to understand which are the main pages most frequented by the respondents.
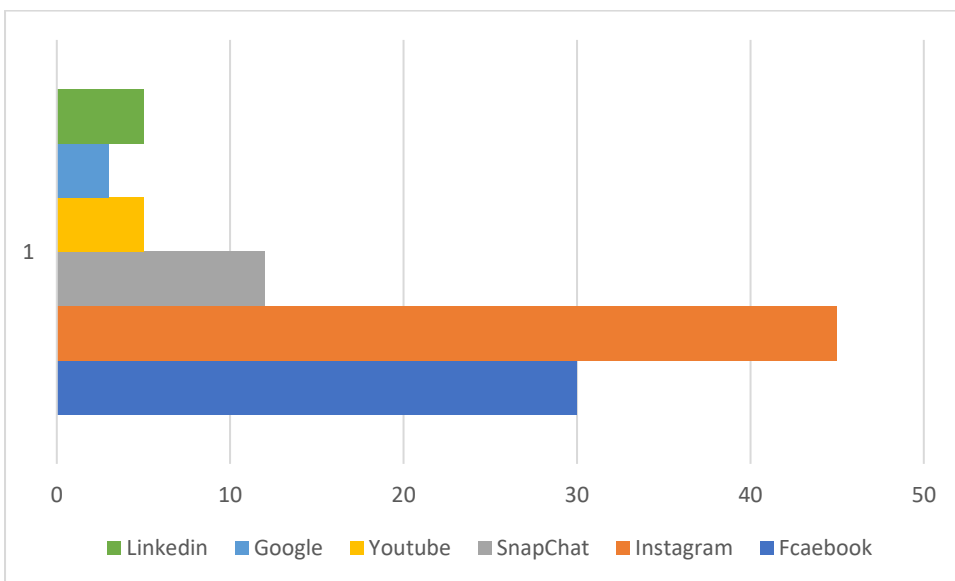
From the processing of the survey data, we understand that the majority of the respondents use Instagram as a means of information and feedback on the various offers offered by tourist agencies. Expressed in numbers out of 100 respondents, 45 of them are Instagram users, 30 use Facebook, 12 of them use Linkedin and a small number choose YouTube and Google.

*4. Do you think that the use of social media has been effective for you in most cases?*

This question evaluates the effectiveness of social media marketing, thus influencing the trust or positive stereotyping that the customer creates during the decision-making process.
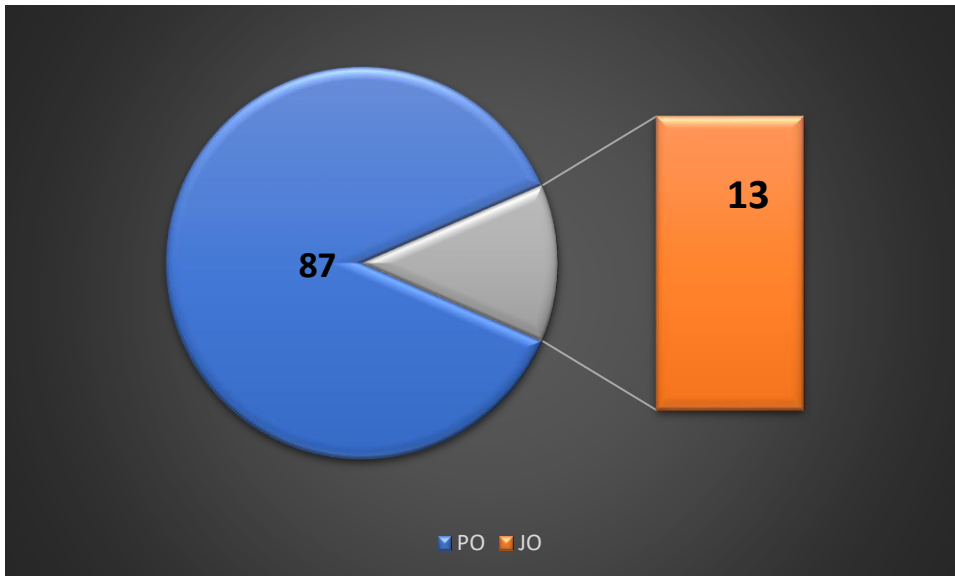
As a result of the survey, it turned out that 87% of the interviewees, a very significant part of them were in favor of the fact that they saw social media as very effective for confronting advertisements, various promotions of agencies.

*5. What is the credibility of the comments left on a certain tourist site?*

This question seeks to draw a conclusion on how far the level of trust of the feedback given by other customers on an offer, package or tourist site goes.
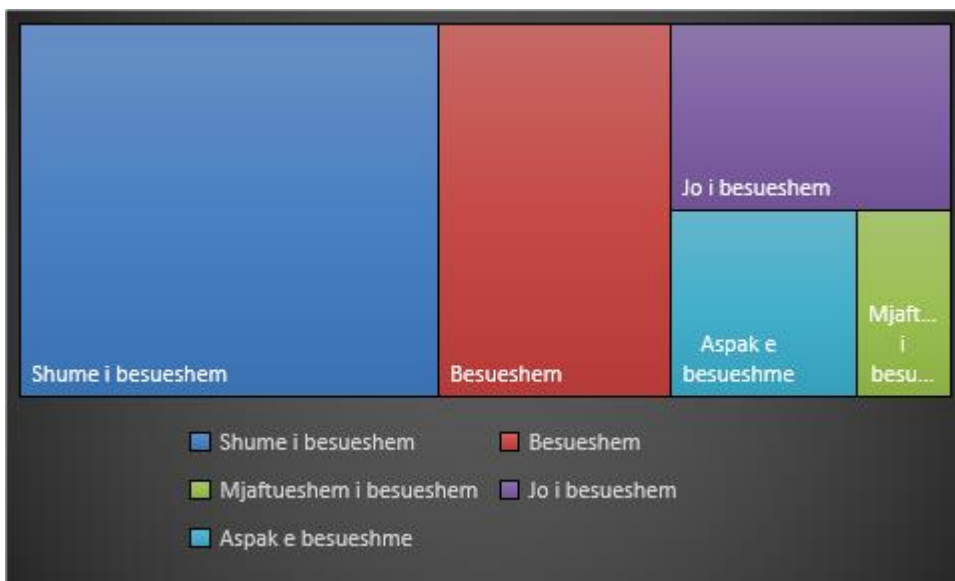
As is known, comments on social media are seen somewhat with a skeptical eye, but in addition to this, the numbers show the opposite where the majority of respondents think and react positively to this phenomenon. About 45% have a lot of faith, 25% are a little reserved, 15% are totally skeptical and a small margin think that what is written about scams are untrue, namely 5% sufficiently and 10% not at all.

6. Did the ranking for a tourist site help you in its selection?

The question assesses how important it is for a customer to know that the place they are going to will leave them with a good impression.
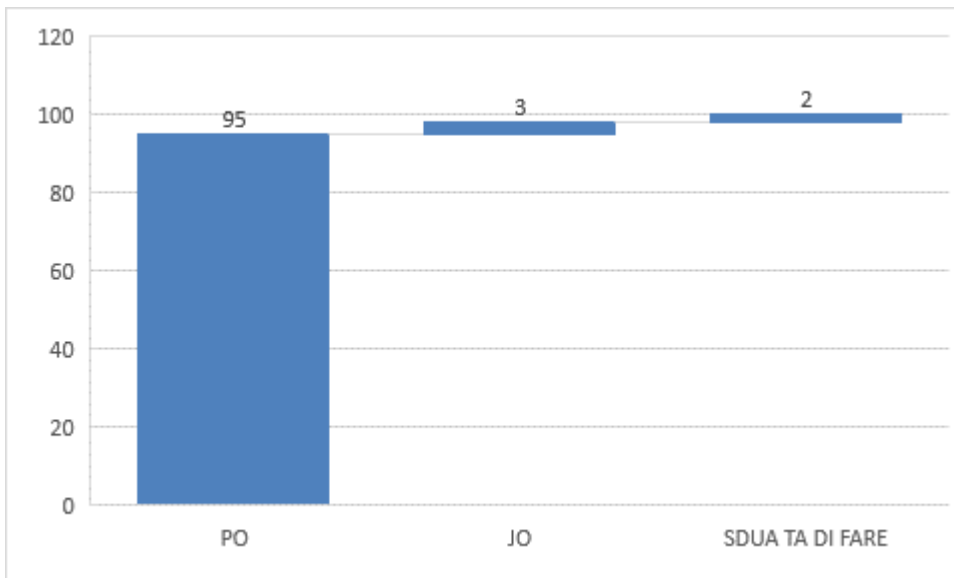
Based on the data obtained, it was found that almost the majority find it very important to have information on the impressions that others have had in the respective countries. 3% of them are against, so positive or negative feedback has no influence for them, but they judge for themselves on the photos or videos published by the agency itself on the respective social pages, meanwhile we also have the category of "indifferent" where they do not want to have information about nothing, but appear more adventurous by discovering it for themselves and having personal opinions and impressions.

7. The first research you do on a tourist site, the first source that comes to mind is:

This question consists in discovering the "fastest way" that customers choose to get information these days.
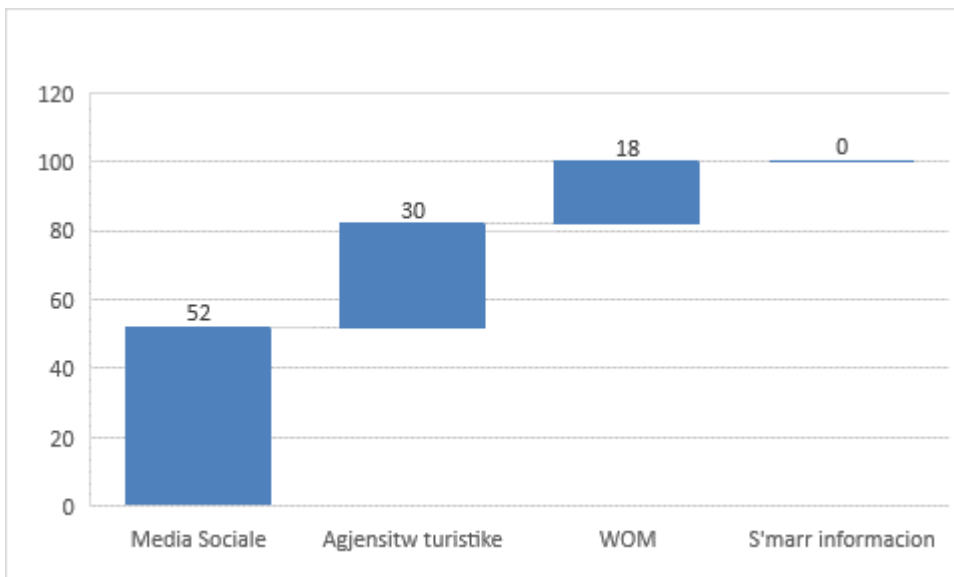
According to the graphic interpretation, it appears that the majority of respondents choose social media to understand or have a general idea about what they want to know, since today everyone has a smart phone, everyone has an account on social media and see it with less cost to understand what it is about. Meanwhile, we have 30% of those who choose to receive information in person, not trusting much in the virtual world, and the rest of the "traditional" still choose the WOM phenomenon as the most reliable source.

Conclusions

Marketing is the most important activity in business because it has a direct effect on profit and sales. The globalization of the economy and the development of new markets as well as global competition have, in a way, pushed firms to be more careful in their marketing activities and explore strategies beyond the traditional marketing, channels and strategies.

Today, social media is not only used as an easy form of communication by ordinary users, but it seems to have injected for several years in a row also businesses of different sectors

The effective and efficient use of social media as an alternative chosen by managers to promote the services, packages they offer, policies they follow has had a very positive effect on the booking of a tourist trip with a high ranking by customers who have shown the good desire to give their impressions and feedback on the past experience.

Based on the study and research done on this issue, it was observed that there are some advantages and disadvantages, where more benefits obtained from their use prevail, mentioned here the lower cost, faster social interaction, customer segmentation of inaccessible etc. Managers prefer to use more Facebook and Instagram as the network most frequented by consumers and very few think to use Google, Pinterest, Slideshare. Also, in terms of the financial contribution that this decision gives, spending and investing in this marketing track has been seen as highly profitable. Emphasizing here the importance of calculating a financial coefficient to "affect" the impact of online marketing based on numbers.

Regarding the results of the survey, it was observed that women are the ones who follow the continuous offers that are published with more interest. Meanwhile, most of them spend an average time of 3 hours/day and the most used networks are Instagram leading with 45%, since today's young people are already greatly appreciating the convenience and innovation that Instagram has shown. With a significant number of 87%, they evaluate social media as a very effective means of communication, while on the other hand, we see that about 52% choose social media as the first information alternative, then the tourist agency, and very few are unfamiliar with technology.

At the end of this article, from all the conclusions drawn through the study, the hypothesis raised on the importance and evaluation of the impact of online marketing on social networks in the customer's decision-making.

Annex QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender:

a) Female

b) Male

2. How active are you on social networks, how many hours a day do you spend on them?

a) 1h/day

b) 3h/day

c) 5h/day

d) All day

3. Which social networks are most frequented by you?

a) Facebook

b) Instagram

c) SnapChat

d) Youtube

e) Google

f) Linkedin

4. Do you think that using social media has been effective for you in most cases?

a) YES

b) NO

5. What is the credibility of the comments left on a certain tourist site?

a) 100%

b) 75%

c) 50%

d) 30%

e) 0%

6. Did the ranking for a tourist site help you in its selection?

a) YES

b) NO

7. The first research you do about a tourist destination, the first source that comes to mind is:

a) Social Media

b) Tourist activities

c) WOM

d) I do not receive information

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