WEB 2.0 AND THE ITS INFLUENCE IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

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Abstract

The widespread use of the Internet for information search about travel and tourism, but especially different applications associated with Web 2.0 technologies such as social networks (facebook, twitter, my space) podcasting, RSS etc, has made many people who travel for tourism purposes to take information and interact with tourism service providers at any time, without paying high costs, in different forms as well, from writing in chat to audio-visual elements associated with tourism demand and supply.

The main objective of this paper is to study whether the use of Web 2.0 is an efficient and useful method for the implementation of tourism marketing and to evaluate direct impacts that Web 2.0 has on costumer's decisions.

Also, this paper presents the impact of Web 2.0 tools, both from the tourism supply and demand point of view, considering that more and more people are using it for tourism purposes.

Keywords: Web 2.0, social media, marketing, tourism, technology

1. Introduction

According to the statistics of UNWTO, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) grew by 4% in 2012, surpassing a record of 1 billion tourists globally for the first time in history. With an additional 39 million tourists, international arrivals reached 1,035 million, up from 996 million in 2011. Demand held well throughout the year, with a stronger than expected fourth quarter (UNWTO, 2013).

The World Wide Web was considered by many researchers as an instrument for tourism marketing purposes during the mid 1990's. The beginning of the Web era, which than was mainly PC-based, enabled marketers to create static online brochures that later evolved into increasingly dynamic, multimedia resources. Nowadays, one of the benefits of the Web is that costumers are able to purchase products/services or to make reservations in the tourism sector, directly online without having to deal with intermediary companies. The second generation Web became

popular in 2005, known as Web 2.0 and transformed the digital world. With more Internet users accessing broadband and surfing the web at higher speeds, social networking, user-generated content, social bookmarking, the sharing of information, videos, images and opinions exponentially increased the amount of content on the Web. Web 2.0 also witnessed a dramatically increased use of the Web by consumers using handheld devices including mobile phones and PDAs (HSMAI, 2009).

Internet technology has a direct impact on companies, customers, suppliers, distributors and potential entrants into an industry (Porter, 2001). Since the emergence of the Internet many studies have been conducted on how this innovation will affect the nature and future of marketing activities (Shunk *et al*., 2007; Yadav and Varadarjan, 2005; Beheshti *et al*., 2006).

This paper aims to explore how the toursm sector is influenced by the web 2.0 technology and how it is used for marketing purposes in order to attract the costumers who actually are using the web 2.0 tools.
The research questions of this paper derive from its aim:
1. Which is the effect of the Web 2.0 in marketing?
2. Does Web 2.0 establishes e better client loyalty, being more customer oriented?
3. Which is the effect of social media in planning holidays?

Based on the information technology in general and Web 2.0 in particular from the supply point of view, it is clear that they encourage the marketing strategies, the disintermediation process reducing the entry barriers in the market, and enables the performance of different activities. Many enterprises promote and sell services through their own web sites, markets and booking portals.

Whereas tourists everywhere are looking for new experiences, retrieve on the Web all the relevant information about a particular destination (such as comments, videos, pictures, images, stories), customize products (such as holiday, travel etc) choosing every detail, and compare prices.

The Web culture has revolutionized and we can now share information through Web 2.0 systems, which means that there is an interactive environment of sharing information and feedbacks, that didn't exist before. Social networking is an outcome from the implementation of Web 2.0 environment and social media have emerged as a tool to the business workplace. (Richemond, 2011).

The internet network is becoming a platform of data and knowledge creation and sharing which harness the network to get better information to all users. Social media, such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook increasing both their number of users every day as well as their role in the customer interaction arena. Now the organisations can exchange valuable information, share videos, pictures, create discussion forums etc. Undoubtedly, the Social

Media offers innovative ways to develop customer relationship management strategies and as e result to affect the enterprise's image, influence, and electronic word-of-mouth . (UNWTO, 2013)

2. Literature review
2.1 Web 2.0 as new technology

According to O'Reilly (2005) Web 2.0, refers to a second generation of web-based services based on citizens/consumer generated content—such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, communication tools, that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users. Also he has defined Web 2.0 as "*the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform*". Web 2.0 applications are not installed on the user's computer, but are provided on the Web.

Taking into consideration only the technology that is used for a Web, not usually classified as Web 2.0, it can be concluded that there are some other factors such as the business structure, the content or the types of services which should be considered in order to determine whether a Web site is Web 2.0. The organizations that use Web 2.0 are more focused on the user and try to do everything they can to satisfy him/her. This is achieved by making Web sites more usable and providing different features for free for which competitors in most cases charge. It uses applications such as user-generated content, consumer oriented business models and the use of new technologies such as RSS (Really Simple Syndication), Asynchronous JavaScript and XML. Web 2.0 tools not only have a sophisticated technical and visual presentation, but also tend to focus on the user and strongly rely on user's feedback and inputs. Due to this fact, all over the world are created the so-called online communities, such as YouTube (www.youtube.com), a video portal with user-provided video content, Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), an online encyclopedia compiled and maintained completely by users, MySpace (www.myspace.com), a popular social network site with a lot of users (Dippelreiter *et al*., 2008).

But how was the evolution from Web 1.0 to Web 3.0? The first stage, Web 1.0 composed by static web pages enabling global information sharing but not interactivity. It was mainly a one-way publishing medium' and information-centric. The second stage called Web 2.0, often called the social or community web, linked people and users, and with user generated content capability and it is considered mostly as people-centric. Introduced in 2001, the third stage of web development Web 3.0 is the Semantic Web, where meaning of content is recognized and understood by computers, enabling *computer to computer* interaction. (Mistilis & Bouhalis, 2012).

According to Yoo and Gretzel (2011), the Consumer Generated Media is as "a new form of word of mouth that serve informational needs by

offering non-commercial, detailed, experiential and up-to-date information with an access beyond the boundaries of one's immediate social circle".

The most popular Web 2.0 applications are blogs, hotel rating systems, forums, RSS, podcasting and wikis, social media, mash-ups etc (Chabot, 2007). Some details about them are the following:

- **Blogs** online diaries with a weak "communitarian" degree: readers can write and add comments. They encourage customers to give their opinions and to share their experiences, pictures and trips.(Boni & Stemart, 2006).

  There are many blogs in the tourism industry, such as tripadvisor.com, hotelchatter.com etc. Anyone can create a weblog by using a software offered for free at different websites, such as the search engine "Google", can use it for publishing links to other blogs, texts, images, Webpages, audio and video files etc. Weblogs are becoming a very important information source for international travelers for getting travel advice and suggestions of tourism service providers. (Sigala, 2007).

- **Forums** are also an important Web 2.0 tool. They enable a gathering of opinions around a topic or a common interest, developed through discussions. There are a lot of forums focused on tourism issues, where thousands of people exchange views and write comments. Some of them are: www.virtualtourist.com (World Travel Forum), www.tourismzone.com etc.

- **Hotel Rating Systems** are one of the first tourism collaborative tools. They give the opportunity for customers to give a mark for services provided during their stay in a hotel, so that other future consumers can make a decision about the hotels they will sleep in and find the best offer (Chabot, 2007).

- **Podcasting** is a contraction of IPod and broadcasting. It is a form of online "à la carte" radio, which uses the RSS technology (Boni & Stemart 2006). Podcasting refers to the uploading of audio and video files by users on websites. The most well-known website for sharing such content with others is www.youtube.com. Nowadays a lot of tourism service providers are using Podcasting as an effective form of marketing, as well as a communication tool.

- **RSS** stands for Really Simple Syndication, a file which allows the user to get updated information what he or she is the most interested in (Boni & Stemart, 2006). People do not need to click on each individual website that he/she is interesting to read any new information, because the RSS feeds all new updated information to the users' RSS reader.

- **Tagging** is a form of keywords or category label used to identify specific contents in the data base. They give a direct access to the information needed . They are used for example by Flickr, the photo sharing website to "*find photos which have something in common*". (Chabot, 2007).
- **Social media**, such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace are increasing the number of users as well as their role in the customer interaction arena. Social media are becoming tourism organization destination marketing tools providing a great impact to the tourism markets markets. Organisations around the world can post valuable information, product videos, pictures, customer testimonials, create discussion forums, and much more. (UNWTO, 2013)
- **Mash – ups**. Mash ups describe the seamlessly combination of two or more different sources of content and-or software for creating a new value added service to users (Sigala, 2007). Generally a mashup is any web feature that builds on services provided by other sites. Some Mash – ups services are provided by Google Maps API services, for finding different locations through an easy and practical way. These application is used very often by tourists for finding hotels, restaurants and other touristic services when are on holidays.
- **Wikis.** A wiki is a Web site that allows users to add and update content on the site using their own web browsers. Those websites are developed collaboratively through their users. The most popular is the wikipedia.com, an online encyclopedia that is created and continually updated by its users. In tourism wikitravel.org represents the effort of Internet users to collaboratively create and continuously update an online global travel guide. (Sigala, 2007)

2.2. Tourism industry and the adoption of Web 2.0

Generally the tourism sector has been one of the main sectors in adopting and developing ICT applications. The internet has become a key application in the tourism industry: Consumers, on the one hand, are able to interact directly with tourism providers, which allows them to identify and satisfy their constantly changing needs for tourism products. Suppliers, on the other hand, are able to deal more effectively with the increasing complexity and diversity of consumer requirements. Tourism providers have been using the internet to communicate, distribute and market their products to potential customers worldwide in a cost- and time-efficient way. In fact, the individual company website had become the most important platform for e-commerce, followed by electronic marketplaces (e-*Business W@tch,* 2004).

The most famous online developments reshaping traditional marketing methods of tourism businesses currently are the Web 2.0 and user-

generated content (Reactive, 2007). Tourism has long been the one of most important components of the online commerce world. Online travel has anticipated ever since (and partly continues to do so) the development of new market dynamics and consumer behaviours (Werthner & Klein, 1999; Werthner & Ricci, 2004). The application of Web 2.0 technology has played a major role because of the fact that how the consumers of a product/service evaluate this experience.

Web 2.0 has placed the tourist between functionality and product distribution. The trends of online services mentioned above have something in common; they are focused on the customer.

Considering the above online trends means that consumers now have more control over decision-making on travel and tourism. But often the entrepreneurs have less control about the fact that how the respective message perceived by the audience they have targeted. But this loss of control would not necessarily have negative effects, as web-sites generated by users can create a kind of loyalty, as well as closed relationships between the customer and the service provider (Cox *et al.,* 2007).

Social media (SM) will be playing a very crucial role as information sources for tourists as they increasingly appear in search engine results in the context of travel related searches. SM is an important part of the search results so tourism service providers of travel-related websites will have to ensure that they include social media in their online marketing. Moreover, successful tourism organisations will increasingly need to identify consumer needs and to interact with prospective clients by using comprehensive, personalised and up-to-date communication media for the design of products that satisfy tourism demand.

2.1.1 Mobile devices as a very useful tool of Web 2.0

Mobile devices encourage tourism communication, as they are easily portable and accessible. Whilst on holiday or on a business trip, travellers can use their smartphones or tablets to find and share information about the destination they are visiting. With large increases in tourists numbers coming from Asian countries, and China in particular (46 million travellers in 2010, and 155 million mobile Internet subscribers), and another 127 million from India, it is vital that tourism destinations reach-out to tourists. The World Travel Monitor has found that 40 % of international travellers travel with a smartphone with an internet connection, e-mail and other functions. Of the smartphone users, 40 % use them to obtain information on the destination, and 26 % of leisure travellers and 34% of business travellers use them to change bookings while travelling. Just over a third of international travellers use their smartphones to access mobile social networks. This leads to tourists posting content on their Facebook pages or Blogs, or photographs on Twitter

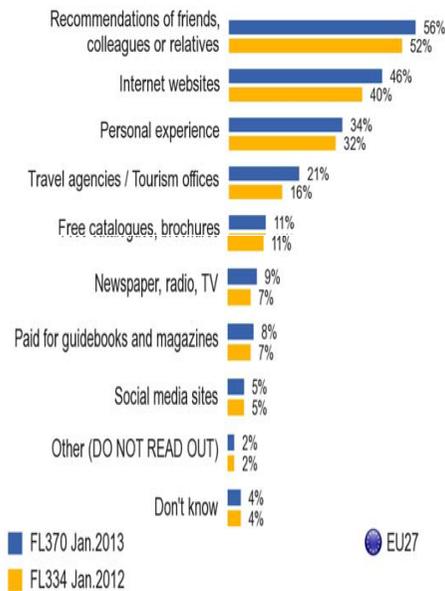or Flickr, whilst they are still at the destination ("UNWTO practicum programme", 2012)

2.1.2 The internet and social media as a source for planning holidays.

There are many ways that people used to plan their holidays. One of the most useful ways are the social media pages which are used mostly by young ages.

According to Flash Barometer "Attitudes of Europeans towards tourism" (2013) from the surveys that are made in the countries of European Union about the sources of information they considered to be most important when making decisions about their travel plans, is concluded that:

More than half (56%) say the recommendations of friends, family or colleagues, **while 46% mention Internet websites**, (34%) consider personal experience important, while 21% say travel agencies and tourism offices and 11% mention free catalogues or brochures. Fewer than one in ten mention newspaper, radio or TV (9%), paid-for guidebooks and magazines (8%) or **social media sites (5%).**

Q10. Of the following information sources, which do you consider to be the most important when you make a decision about your travel plans?

Base: Total number of respondents
Figure 1."*Sources of holiday planning*". Copyrighted by Flash Eurobarometer, 2013.

- The Internet remains the most common way to arrange holidays

The Internet remain the most common way to arrange holidays, with 53% using it for this reason in 2012. Around one in five (21%) used someone they know, while 19% used the phone or visited a travel agency.

Around one in ten (11%) made the arrangements on site, while 6% used the counter at a transportation company and 3% made arrangements by post (Flash Eurobarometer, 2013).

3. Methodology

The method used in this paper is that of a systematic literature review. For this reason, the author has selected related articles, from 1980 until 2011. Due to limitations in accessing all electronic sources the final articles reviewed reached the number 15. Inclusion criterion was to find in the abstract one or more of these terms: Web 2.0, marketing, tourism. From the first articles, some of them were excluded because, with further reading, it was found that they weren't appropriate for this review.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, Web 2.0 has a major impact in the tourism sector, because more and more people use the Internet in order to be informed about tourism destinations and services/products. Social media are becoming particular tourism organization marketing and communication tools as they influence directly the decision making process of the costumers.

Web 2.0 platforms enable the process of connecting to consumers, but at the same time it is difficult to control the reaction of them about the message/photo/audio or video file that is received.

When people share their travel experiences through weblogs, this can also create a possibility for travelling and visiting the same tourism destinations or service providers by other people who read those experiences.

Weblogs in the tourism sector may be considered as electronically word of mouth marketing methods. Sometimes through web 2.0 tools such as podcasting the tourism services could be more reliable to the eyes of the costumer, or as "tangible" as possible.

Smartphones are a very useful and helpful tool for the travelers using Web 2.0 applications. Tourists can have a very small "tourist guide" in their pocket.

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