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Heritage as an alternative driver for sustainable development and economic recovery in South East Europe

## Heritage tourism entrepreneurship and social media: opportunities and challenges

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### Abstract

Heritage tourism entrepreneurship is related to the development of businesses in the field of heritage tourism, meaning businesses oriented towards the cultural heritage of the locations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, businesses have to face enormous challenges, induced by globalization and emergence of new information and communication technologies. More than ever, businesses have to assess consumer preferences, being more aware not just of their physical needs, but also of their aspiration. Social media comes with new challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship in terms of developing the marketing mix and addressing to the preferences of visitors in tourism destinations. Consumers are now present on social networks due to the Internet development and thus businesses have to move on the on-line environment in order to be more close to the market. The answer to the question “Is this also available for Romanian heritage tourism?” seems positive and the paper will emphasize the role of social media in supporting the development of heritage tourism entrepreneurship in Romania.

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## 1. Introduction

The popularity of heritage tourism will increase in the coming years and the growth rates in this segment exceeds the world average, especially since it includes different sub-sections: archaeology, architecture, art, tours of churches and cathedrals, historic tours, museums, military history, music festivals, opera and pilgrimages. Europe has kept the treasure diversity and cultural heritage which remains an asset, important not only for tourism, but also to the attractiveness of the knowledge economy and in terms of inter-cultural skills useful in a globalized economy (European Commission, 2007).

Considering the large diversity of cultural and heritage products and the desire of entrepreneurs to attract more visitors they need to address new marketing instruments. Information and communication technologies such as Internet are becoming more frequently used by entrepreneurs, in order to develop their business and to improve their marketing mix, in order to address the desire and need of the heritage consumers. The investments in the use of new technologies have to be higher in order to improve the heritage packages, distribution channels, booking, promotion activities, and price policies.

Visitors will continue to use maps, and promotional publication, in order to collect information about specific heritage location, still the use of Internet for these purposes will increase and the websites are becoming more visual and attractive. Moreover, visitors do not want just to collect information via Internet, but they want to provide feedback from their previous cultural experiences, and this is possible in our days through social media like blogs, forums where there are various topic discussions about travel and tourism journeys. The next generation of heritage visitors will be more closely keen into communication technologies and the entrepreneurs need to be aware of these trends and to create appropriate messages, transmit them and develop efficient marketing tools for the interest of the next generation.

The preference of potential tourists for innovative e-services will enhance the tourism experience before, during, and after a visit to the cultural destinations (Strielkowski et al., 2012). Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) appreciate that social media has become the *modus operandi* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is particularly for young generation, but the question is if that this will be also true in the next decades.

The present paper aims to investigate the development of heritage tourism entrepreneurship as a result of the extension of information and communication technologies and particularly of the emergence of social media. Next section will present a general perspective of heritage tourism entrepreneurship in 21<sup>st</sup> century and the importance of consumer for businesses. Section three will discuss about communication and technological innovation in heritage tourism. Section four will discuss the role of social media in supporting tourism entrepreneurship. Section five presents the implication of social media in tourism heritage businesses for the case of Romania. The last section concludes the article.

## 2. Heritage tourism entrepreneurship in 21<sup>st</sup> century: from business to consumer

Heritage tourism offers tremendous economic and social opportunities for local communities in terms of supporting the development of entrepreneurship. Still, tourism should not be seen as a saviour or a paradigm for economic development of regions. The heritage entrepreneurs should be creative in order to find suitable solutions for financing different tourism activities starting with sponsoring events, grant funds, donations, also puts the financial pressure on foreign visitors (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). In exchange tourists seek to find quality services of tourism products and sites (interpretation), information for tourists, visitation services, diversification and upgrading of the heritage experience, etc.

During their holidays, visitors need the desire to experience new, authentic experiences through the participation to various events and rituals, interaction with local communities, acquisition of genuine handicrafts, honesty and opened interrelationships based on other lives and times. The opportunities for tourism

heritage entrepreneurs appear through the valorisation of niche tourists, thus offering more special interest holidays to remote locations and unique, colourful cultures (Macleod, 2006).

Stuart-Hoyle and Lovell (2006) encourage more 'active consumption' of 'living' heritage, broadening the perception of the cultural heritage. The visitors will look not only authenticity, but also 'simplicity' and 'honesty' of the past. Strong cultural products will be those linking the traditional heritage products with the creative industries such as media and entertainment, design, architecture, fashion, etc., through tolerance and diversity (ETC, 2005). Still, innovation will remain the key element for this 'active consumption', as the visitors are more demanding and more oriented to service quality.

Heritage tourism is particularly sensitive to the quality of services provided by the tourism operators, as the tourists involved in this type of tourism are particularly more educated, with higher disposable incomes and expect a certain level of quality. For heritage tourism business the aspects related to the service quality is important, but it is needed to be correlated to the experience of visitors derived for the interaction with those particular services.

The transmitted message is equally important for the heritage consumer. It should be noticed that the message should be addressed in order to be fashionable, for entertainment but also for educational purposes. The content of the message will be different if the message is tailored for a niche market or for mass tourism, where the message should be comprehensible for a wide range of population (Boniface and Fowler, 2003). Sometimes, simplified information gets quickly to the target market, especially if it is more visual. The preferences of the heritage tourists become more fragmented and more difficult to be covered by the heritage producers. In the end, various visitors will perceive differently the same heritage product in accordance to their perceived and understood message.

### **3. Communication and technological innovation: the path ahead in heritage tourism**

The emerging of information and communication technologies (ICT) brought more opportunities for tourism business, in general and heritage tourism in particular. For business ICT improved the way in which firms distribute their products, transactions and the general flow of information (Morrison et al., 2006). The development of ICT means more value added for both entrepreneurs and visitors. Moreover, in order to survive, firms are forced in implementing new communication technologies otherwise will be overwhelmed by competition. Boniface and Fowler (2003) consider that 'technological innovation and attitudinal change are likely to be keystones of advances in heritage presentations'.

For entrepreneurs, new technological opportunities means new instruments for marketing support, package development, price development and adjustments, booking, access to sophisticated databases, networks, etc. (Morrison et al., 2006; Wanhill, 2004). The number of e-tourism companies using ICT will continue rising in the next decades as a pre-requisite for development. Lee-Ross and Lashley (2009) argue that the key for these companies is to take a strategic perspective and focus on the appropriate areas.

E-marketing is viewed by entrepreneurs as important to support business development. In order to have improved promotion and communication in the online environment, the companies need to concentrate on e-marketing policies, enriching the marketing-mix at lower costs, quicker response and personalized content (Al-Hasan et al., 2003)

The Internet had a tremendous impact on how businesses are held and developed in the tourism sector, and also represented a major support for their expansion. The Digital World became more powerful each day and forced businesses to be present in the virtual space in order to remain competitive and make online business transactions.

The visitors become more interested in new technologies as enterprises offer instruments to experience hyper-real attraction far away from the original places and thus from ancient traditions and their community, and consequently affecting the authenticity of the experiences (Macleod, 2006). In other words, ICT bring

shortcomings for heritage sector in terms of unauthentic experiences and globalization of culture.

Internet makes visitors more curious in discovering new places and culture, willing to visit their worldwide neighbours. Internet becomes an efficient marketing instrument for all components of marketing mix (product, price, distribution, promotion). Tourists have much more control on the information and instruments to make a travel arrangement in order to have access to different tourism products starting with all types of tourism establishments to multinational hotel chains, airlines and cultural facilities (Wilkinson, 2001).

Consequently, entrepreneurs need to be more aware about the impact of using Internet as a marketing tool. Horns and Tsai (2010) emphasize the need for adequate design of tourism website which are attractive for tourists as presentation, exposing relevant and crucial information (e.g. potential tourist destinations, activities, and services). Moreover, interactive designs allow the identification of consumers' interests and encourage their participation and future returns.

Strielkowski et al. (2012) points out that e-service in cultural tourism, provided on the Internet, are not enough for visitors and they need additional sources such as access kiosks. Moreover, tourists expressed the desire to leave messages and recommendations based on their experiences in forum discussions and these suggestions to be taken into consideration in order to improve and personalize the specific heritage offers. Still, the tourist information need to be reliable for visitors and increase trust in tourism operators and thus improve satisfaction.

Neuts et al. (2013) identify differences in the use of e-services considering age, educational level, incomes. Younger tourists use more intensively e-services and they will continue to use them as they get older. Tourists with educational level use more interactive maps and electronic book, while people with lower level of education prefer e-forums, virtual tours, interactive games, or personalized information. On the other hand, tourists with higher incomes use electronic journey planners more intensively, while tourists with the lower income prefer e-forums in order to plan a tour.

Furthermore, new technologies are emerging and help consumers to get in touch rapidly with the information. New gadgets (e.g. PDAs and smart mobile phone, tablets, iPads) are more present in the consumer's world and useful tools in promoting and gain information about cultural heritage. Consequently, the Internet connections through Wi-Fi in different locations need to be provided by tourism operators in order to maintain vivid the interest of visitors.

Consequently, there is not general recipe in order to present the information for the visitors, and the entrepreneurs need to adapt, to establish suitable objectives and provide relevant information for their customers. Large amount of information become too difficult to be assimilated, and it is serious trap for tourist providers, while the lack of information is not good for the tourists, and they will refocus to other providers.

#### **4. The role of social media in supporting tourism entrepreneurship**

The use of social media in tourism and travel industry is rapidly growing. It becomes an important marketing instrument for tourism entrepreneurs, impossible to neglect and to which marketers should pay more attention.

Tourists plan travel and gather information using social networks, they collect tips from friends and other virtual contacts and the decisions are strongly influenced by these networks (Richards, 2011). Social media, due to its advantages related to cost, relations, audience, time, became a preferred marketing tool by businesses, especially during the economic crisis (Kirtiş and Karahan, 2011). Currently, most marketing strategies cover measures related to social media. It offers the major advantage of reaching customers in different parts of the world and receiving feedback in real time, employing minimum resources.

Currently, tourists have the possibility to make reviews, comment, and present different perception of destinations, which may be read in various parts of the world using social media networks (Mansson, 2011). Consequently, tourists became *prosumers in social media*, meaning that they are benefiting from marketing

activities initiated by companies, but also getting involved in promoting and improving the tourism products and packages. Moreover, sometimes tourists trust more other tourists which had heritage tourism experience, instead of nice, eye-catching presentations of companies from websites, brochures, leaflets, TV, etc.

Cultural products well promoted and presented in the media become a stimulus for tourism activities, as it attracts visitors through their content. Tourists not only consume media products but they also generate various links between products (Mansson, 2011) empowering the consumer and helping the entrepreneurs with promotion and innovative ideas.

ICT and social media represent useful tools in the identification of tourist's needs and thus providing personalized, innovative up-to-date products and services. Thus, business' website and web pages should be permanently opened to tourism suggestions and complains, transforming them in channel of communication with the costumers. Moreover, consumers should be able to introduce personal data in their profile, so the entrepreneurs develop the tourist profile and furthermore design tailored, suitable tourist products (Buhalis and Law, 2008)

Enterprises need to be more focused on technological innovation and take advantage of the proliferation of social media use. They need to use the new media (blog sites, Facebook pages, Tripadvisor, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram etc.) in order to improve brand equity, advertise, create additional distribution and booking channel, which currently are impossible to neglect (Buhalis and Murphy, 2009) in a competitive and globalized world. One of the most popular type of social media are blogs as they are use in supporting destination brand and influence traveller's decision to visit different locations (Lange-Faria and Elliot, 2012). Other important output of Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) research are conclusions related to 3D virtual technologies which are gaining more attention and their experience could influence the attitudes and perceptions of visitors towards a place.

According to Xiang and Gretzel research (2010), even if social media does not have the same status in Google as other contents provided by tourism operators, and does not consume all spaces on search results pages, social media will continue to contribute to consumer-generated content, but it will still let tourism marketers to improve the content of their websites and compete for consumers' attention.

Consequently, social media contributes to the improvement of tourism service quality and enriches the visitor's satisfaction. Tourism entrepreneurs should embrace the social media tools and Internet technologies in their marketing strategies if they want to remain competitive on the market.

## 5. Implications of social networks in tourism heritage: case study Romania

In Romania, firms' approach of marketing via social networks has grown rapidly in the last years, being registered a rapid orientation to social media, in order to promote products or services. According to a study of Ernst&Young Romania (2013), 78% of representatives of companies from various industries use social networks for promotion, and 52% use social media marketing of about 1-3 years. Most of the respondents who use social media are focused on Facebook, followed by those who use YouTube, and LinkedIn. Graphic and visual content is preferred by visitors, and not that one of text and blogging. Top three **benefits associated with the use of social networks** are increase market exposure, increase the awareness of the firm and customer loyalty, and traffic growth.

In 2012, the percent of Romanian population using **Internet** was 44.1% (internetworldstats.com). The largest segment of Internet users is between 16-74 years old, domestic and urban, and about 50% of Internet users have access to social media networks (businessculture.org). Social media is composed of social networking sites (for example Facebook), but also from content communities (YouTube), blogs and microblogs (for example, Twitter), etc. For **Facebook** subscribers, 24.6% was the penetration rate. Thus, social media is a tool used by people accessing the Internet. In 2013, Facebook has the first position in the top of social media networks used by Romanians, followed by Twitter and Hi5 (Barbu, 2014).

In order to create an image about using social media to identify opportunities for heritage tourism, several statistics from the website socialbakers.com were used. When the “travel” tag is selected, the statistics indicated that most fans have businesses involved in accommodation (hotels and other assimilated facilities, such as: Ave Hotel București, Hotel Sport Poiana Brașov, etc), booking (Paravion.ro) and travel agencies (Explore Travel, J’Info Tours). Regarding heritage assets from Bucharest, the interest of visitors as compared with other tourist assets is lower, still their number of fans is growing. Two of the most well-known museums in Romania are “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum and Romanian Peasant Museum, and together have registered over 40,000 Facebook fans, their large majority being from Romania, followed by visitors from Italy and UK (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Facebook fans in January, 2014

"Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum, Bucharest, Romania				Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest, Romania			
No.	Country	Local Fans	% of Fan Base	No.	Country	Local Fans	% of Fan Base
1	Romania	6201	86.80%	1	Romania	33697	85.30%
2	Italy	139	1.90%	2	Italy	1146	2.90%
3	United Kingdom	83	1.20%	3	United Kingdom	628	1.60%
4	Spain	73	1.00%	4	Spain	470	1.20%
5	United States	71	1.00%	5	United States	463	1.20%
6	Other and not yet targeted countries	577	8.10%	6	Other and not yet targeted countries	3122	7.90%

Source: socialbakers.com.

The website socialbakers.com statistics about Facebook pages of other heritage assets indicate a lower interest: Peleş Castle from Sinaia (with 12583 fans), Bran Castle from Bran (9140 fans), Corvins' Castle from Hunedoara (6887 fans), Biertan fortified church from Biertan (170 fans), etc.

**YouTube** is a powerful social media tool, being related to the idea of uploading and viewing video files. There are a lot of materials related to heritage tourism on this platform, and anyone who is interested can easily access information and movies about heritage tourism destinations, such as: various museum, castles, churches, and so on. Also, the YouTube advantage offered to the visitors is related to the possibility of uploading a movie of the visited asset, displaying own experiences on the platform, also with own thoughts and positive or negative reviews. Consequently, not only a business from tourism heritage area can make a movie and post it, but also any visitor who can share experiences, thoughts, personal perspectives.

The presence of tourism heritage from Romania on **Twitter** is represented by various assets, such as: Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest, Romania (@MuzeulTaranului), National Museum Complex Astra from Sibiu, Romania (@astramuseum), National Museum of Romanian History, Bucharest (@MNIR\_), Baia Mare Artistic Center Art Museum, Baia Mare (@ArtaBaiaMare), Peleş National Museum, Sinaia (@castelulpeles), Corvins' Castle, Hunedoara (@CastelCorvini), Castelul Bethlen from Criș (@castelulbethlen), The Church from Capu Dealului, Drăgășani (also named The Church with horse, @biserica\_cu\_cal), etc.

On **blogs**, the heritage is represented by assets such as: Baia Mare Artistic Center Art Museum, Baia Mare (muzeuldeartabaiamare.wordpress.com), The Church from Capu Dealului, Drăgășani (also named The Church with horse, capudealului.blogspot.ro), Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum, Bucharest, Romania (muzeul-satului-dimitrie-gusti.blogspot.ro), Romanian Peasant Museum, Bucharest (muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/blog), Ion Irimescu Art Museum, Fălticeni (ionirimescu.wordpress.com), etc.

Social media may represent an effective tool for businesses in the field of heritage tourism. Those who will know how to take advantages from using it will discover new opportunities on the market and will be with a step ahead of their competitors. Thus, when a unique and authentic experience is offered, the results, besides the increase in visitor satisfaction, will be related to the positive reviews in social media channels which “travel” much faster from a consumer to another. The final aim is obtaining new visitors for the assets and increasing financial results with benefits also for the local communities. As social media channels continue to evolve, new communication platforms emerge which creates new tools and trends, and also shape the consumer

behaviour. Thus, the use of social media becomes a challenge, as the activity goes from the stage of “just having fun and have an Internet search” for consumers to that of a much more important role for businesses, of presenting the company's products and services in order to attract new customers. Regarding heritage tourism business sector, social media allows for various activities, such as organizing the supply, promotion, and other marketing activities important for a business. Social networks can change the consumers’ behaviour, the travel and search patterns for best offers, and how they present their experiences. Social media allows them to request information about the activities they plan, about tips on best offers, about creating discussions with other people who represent reliable sources and had real experiences. Therefore, consumers are currently better informed and they arrive to the destination owning more knowledge and skills than in the past, and with higher expectations.

## **6. Conclusions**

In the literature, there are proofs that new technological advancements can help a business in various ways, including in marketing activities, products and services distribution, development of offers, booking, networks, etc. For a heritage tourism business, the development of the technology is very important, but it needs to be closely related to the needs and the expectations of today visitors which are more complex and sophisticated. Heritage tourism entrepreneurs need to be more closely involved in using social media tools in the development and promotion of their heritage tourism offers, and to not neglect their benefits in terms of costs and advertising impact. It is important for tourism heritage businesses to adopt social media in promotion purposes, because through their unique stories may get an important place in the minds of many potential visitors. Social media application for heritage tourism businesses may raise different aspects that refer to the appointment of persons to handle the social media channels, and solutions required in investing resources to create and support the development of channels that provide that promise of truly unique and authentic experiences. However, it is important that through these channels of social media, businesses not to overdo with the information volume for prospective visitors. Additionally, management must be carefully planned and be able to identify answers regarding target audience, preferred social media channel, etc. When a heritage tourism business plans to use social media, it should take into account various other aspects related to objectives, strategy, budgeting, implementation, etc. Heritage tourism businesses starting using social media should based their strategy on the impact assessment of the decision of using specific communication tools and allocation of time and resources available for releasing the social media channel and maintenance. Also, management should identify the opportunity of using social media. To attract visitors on chosen social media platforms, heritage tourism businesses should consider creating sections of comments and questions, for developing ideas and opinions, responses to questions or requests, etc. It is important to consider the increase in interaction on the social media platform through various applications, contests, etc. Through social media, a heritage tourism business can create and increase reputation, and it is important that the information presented to be honest. In Romania, the way in which representatives of firms approach marketing activities through social networks shows an increase in the use of such platforms. From the search performed on social media platforms the conclusion is that there is a presence of Romanian heritage tourism assets, but an increase in this presence is also necessary. It is important for heritage tourism businesses to start using social media within organization, so that businesses better promote themselves through channels, such as blogs, pages of social networks, etc. Heritage tourism businesses need strategies to ensure that the opportunities and challenges provided by advancements in the sphere of technology offers only advantages, being important for managers to be one step ahead in terms of innovation. The developments from the social media sphere offer advantages for heritage assets, because the visibility of destinations can be increased, being necessary to rethink the communication strategies.

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