HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT INFORMATION TO PLAN A TRIP

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Abstract
The purpose of the research is to reveal the young tourists preferences in the process of planning a trip. Sources of information used, the utility of Internet/travel agencies in planning travel trip activities, preferred means of transportation and types of accommodation are investigated. As research methods, there used both qualitative and quantitative methods: focus group and survey. Internet is more used by young tourists in planning trips than travel agencies are. Internet is considered more useful in the documentation stage and when buying airline tickets. Young tourists are more influenced by friends when planning a trip. Young tourists prefer cars and planes as means of transportation for a trip and hotels and guesthouses as accommodation when traveling.

Key words: *Accommodation; Internet; Transportation; Travel agency; Young tourists.*

JEL Classification: *M31; L83*

INTRODUCTION

Information is considered vital in the tourism industry, without it, encouraging potential customers and their capacity to travel would of been limited (Wagner, 1991, p.105; Manolică, 2006).

The potential tourists need proper information before going on a trip, in order to help them in planning and choosing different options. Also, they need access to accurate and comprehensive information during their visit, the trend consisting of growing the independence of the trip (Preston, Trunkfield, 2006).

Traditional information sources take different forms, either directly from the travel suppliers (hotels, airlines etc.), either from intermediaries (travel agencies, tour operators, brokers of information) (Kotler, Armstrong et al., 1996). They traditionally provide information using two methods: by distributing promotional material printed and/or by personal contact (Dube, Renaghan, 2000).

Printed materials such as brochures and catalogues, suffer from several limitations. Printing represents a static environment, with a limited capacity to properly transmit the complexity of tourism experiences (Middleton, 1994). In addition, printed materials involves costs and time, and the resulting materials are rapidly becoming obsolete (new promotions appear, the period given it ends,

different seasons and so on) (Butnaru, Bordeianu, 2012).

The Internet is an important information source for young people (Zins, 2007, p.149). However, senior travelers still prefer the printed brochures as the main source of information (Lin, 2005, p.49) and many travelers use the Internet to plan a trip in conjunction with the offline information (Lee, Soutar at al., 2007, p.165). The Web is considered as a platform where the user is not anymore a passive character; the user has become an active character able to create and generate contents and services (Nafria, 2007); it is a bidirectional flow of communication (Dellarocas, 2003). Web pages have become interactive allowing users to establish connections with other users (peer to peer) and meet through online communities, forums, chat rooms and different social media platforms; and this is done in order to exchange information concerning for instance products, experiences, opinions and ideas which in this case are about trips, hotels, experiences etc.

Also, transmitting information in a personal way is much more efficient because the information provided to potential customers can be much closely customized to their needs. However, this approach is also problematic. Tourism is an industry scattered with potential customers (Manolică, Roman, 2011), coming from everywhere and who want to go everywhere. Every potential tourist needs a customized pack of information (Ştefănică, Butnaru,

2013), with different needs and desires, and the development of information technology can provide a solution to this "knowledge gap" (Buhalis, 2000). For customers seeking information on the Internet regarding the lowest room rates, the website of the travel agency and of the booking agencies is considered to be the best choice (Law, Chan et al., 2007, p.495).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of the research is to reveal the young tourists preferences in the process of planning a trip.
The objectives of this research are:
1. Investigation of information sources usefulness and identification of the reservation manners used to plan a trip (Internet vs. tourism agency);
2. Defining the students' tips planning behavior.
1. Derived from these objectives, past research and a qualitative research we conducted, the research hypotheses were established.

H1: The Internet offers more useful tools in planning a trip than the travel agencies do;

Referring to Internet and travel agencies, recent studies have shown that most consumers of online products and/or services tend to seek for the lowest price. For example, according to researchers Yesawich, Pepperdine and Brown (2000), about 6 out of 10 consumers are looking for lowest prices possible for the touristic services. A study conducted by Joint Hospitality Industry Congress (2000) found that there are real expectations from consumers on finding the lowest prices on the Internet compared to those offered by travel agencies.

The tourist is no longer a passive consumer that enters into a travel agency and lies a few hours to purchase/organize a trip. The new tourist is much more active, he likes to be involved in the acquisition process and he is flexible in selecting and providing services (Poon, 1993). Nowadays, tourists use less the travel agencies and prefer more the Internet as a main source of information and a way of purchasing the tourism products and services. The Internet has become one of the most important source of information for consumers (Zins, 2007, p.149), especially for younger and better educated consumers (Beritelli, Bieger at al., 2007; Casanova, Kim at al., 2005; Seabra, Abrantes at al., 2007). According to Professor Buhalis (2002), there are numerous factors that motivate tourists for using the Internet: first, the complexity and depth of the information provided, secondly, the information provided is easy to use, thirdly, tourists can access the information at any time

and at a reduced price, in the end, tourism products are usually offered at reduced prices on the Internet, as suppliers operate with fewer intermediaries (which saves a lot of commissions).

The results of the qualitative research we made show that students consider Internet as the most useful tool for collecting information and comparing touristic offers. They also declared that they don't use Internet and travel agencies for buying touristic products.

H2: Young tourists are more influenced by friends when planning a trip;

According to the 2013 Portrait of American Travelers study, 82% of travelers trust recommendations from friends and family, 74% of US travelers have a Facebook profile and one out of three travelers' reference social media as a main source of travel ideas and inspiration (Patterson, 2013).

According to Blackwell et al. (2006), the benefits perceived by consumers are higher when (1) consumer's knowledge about a product is little or zero, (2) consumer does not have the ability to evaluate products, (3) the consumer does not trust marketers advertising (traditional media), (4) other information's sources produced little credibility to the consumer, (5) consumer has great needs of social approval, (6) the product or service is complex, (7) strong social ties exist between sender and receiver, like friends, family members etc. (Granovetter, 1973), (8) a product or service is difficult to test (9) and the product is highly visible to others. In regards to the strength of ties, depending on the degree of the relationship among people, the perception and influences over the consumer decisions making process will be higher or lower (Brownm Reingen, 1987; Granovetter, 1973). It has been also discussed the idea that sources of information linked with a strong connection, will be perceived as more credible than sources with a weak connection; hence, sources with a strong connection will be perceived as more credible than weak tie's sources.

The results of a study conducted by Carr (2003) *Use And Trust Of Tourism Information Sources Amongst University Students* show that the most trusted source of information were informal ones such as those from friends and relatives, previous visits and the Internet was the least utilized source of information in finding out about a possible trip.

According to UNWTO report Youth Travel Matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel around 50% of young travelers book their travel or accommodation with specialist agencies because of the information provided and the price advantages they offer.

Most of the participants at the three focus groups we conducted before the survey mention that they are influenced by friends and family when they want to plan a trip.

H3: Young tourists prefer planes as means of transportation for a trip;

The growth of low-cost airline companies influences young travellers to choose planes as a preferred way of transportation when planning a trip. It is very important to mention that the means of transportation changes depending the type and destination of the trip. Planes are often used for outbound trips, for example in the main capitals of Europe, where low-cost carriers (like Ryanair, Wizzair, Easyjet etc.) have very good connections and, of course, promotions.

According to UNWTO report for 2012 in order to reach a particular destination, most tourists choose air travel (52%) and the rest use services of terrestrial transport, such as: roads (40%), railways (only 2%) and sea travel (6%).

H4: Young tourists prefer hotels and tents as accommodation places for a trip.

These last two hypotheses were formulated based on the information revealed from qualitative research. Students presented at the focus groups talked about the comfort planes are offering, reducing the time of the travel and being more secure than cars. Most of them declared they prefer to stay at a hotel or even a tent, depending on the destination type. The main form of accommodation for young travellers continues to be hostels, but the proportion of travellers staying in budget hotels is also very high (Youth Travel Matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel, UNWTO, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Research methods

We conducted three focus groups with the purpose to understand young tourists' behaviour and create a questionnaire for the quantitative part of the research. The resulted questionnaire was tested on 30 respondents, from the selected population.

The sample

The sample is represented by young people with high level of education, bachelor's degree students, master's degree students and Phd students at Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. The students must have planned at least one trip during the past year and they agreed to participate at the research. The sample for the qualitative research consists in 24 people, choosen based on a selection questionnaire. The sample for the quantitative research included 230 respondents and only 217 valid questionnaires. The sample method was stratified sampling.

RESULTS

Objective 1. Investigation of information sources usefulness and identification of the reservation manners used to plan a trip (Internet vs. tourism agency)

On a scale of 1 to 5, students evaluated the extent to which they prefer a certain source of information (1 – Very little extent; 2 – Little extent; 3 – Some extent; 4 – Great extent; 5 – Very great extent). Sources of information most preferred are reviews on the Internet (3.92), opinions of friends, families or colleagues (3.91) and specialized sites of tourism (3.90). We notice that Internet is more used than travel agencies in the process of planning a touristic trip, in the stage of information gathering. Another important source is represented by recommendations of familiar people or those that already have been to that place. The least preferred sources are offered by travel agencies: brochures, catalogues, posters (3.20) and travel agency staff (3.20) (Table 1).

Table 1 - Source of information preferred in planning touristic trips

Source of information	Average
Reviews on the Internet (opinions written by those who have been in that place)	3.92
Families, friends, colleagues	3.91
Specialized sites of tourism	3.90
Verbal recommendations of those that already have been to that place	3.86
Websites of hospitality / tourism (hotels, transport companies, restaurants etc.)	3.72
Websites of travel agencies	3.66
Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs etc.)	3.33
Advertising videos on the Internet	3.28
TV, radio, magazines (mass-media)	3.25
Brochures, catalogues, posters of travel agencies	3.20
Travel agency staff	3.20

As booking methods, students use most often the phone (42.3%) and the Internet (42.3%) in the same measure. Travel agency booking services are used by 14.9% of the students. 0.5% used other manner of booking. People who make reservations by Internet declared their preferred sources of information are the reviews on the Internet (opinions written online by those who have been in that place) (4.07), families, friends, colleagues' opinions (3.94) and specialized sites of tourism (3.9). People who make reservations by phone prefer to inform especially from families, friends, colleagues (4.00), reviews on the Internet (3.93) and verbal recommendations of those that already have been to that place (3.9). As for 14.9% of the students who use travel agency booking services, their favourite sources of information are specialized sites of tourism (3.97) and websites of travel agencies (3.94).

We also conducted a factor analysis in order to

group the sources of information. The analysis delivered three factors that explain 56% of the total variance. We investigated if all items had loadings > 0.3 on each factor, then we investigated the loadings in the rotated matrix. Because some items had similar loadings, we decided to eliminate them and run the factor analysis again. The eliminated items were: "Travel agency staff" and "Social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs etc.)".

The second analysis delivered two factors that explain 50% of the total variance. According to Garson, D. (2010), some researchers recommend to keep in the analysis factors that explain 90% or 80% of the variance. If the research purpose is to explain variance using as few factors as possible, the criterion can be even as low as 50%.

Our purpose is not to simplify the number of factors for this particular research. Also, as the first run of the analysis delivers 3 factors that explain more of the total variance (56%), we decided to group the sources into three factors. The three factors as we named them with the composed items are:

(1) **Specialized sources**: specialized sites of tourism, websites of travel agencies and websites of hospitality / tourism (hotels, transport companies, restaurants etc.);

(2) **People sources**: reviews on the Internet, families, friends, colleagues and verbal recommendations of those that already have been to that place;

(3) **General media sources**: TV, radio, magazines (mass-media), travel agency staff, brochures, catalogues, posters of travel agencies, advertising videos on the Internet and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Blogs etc.).

Also, our purpose is to group the sources of information into categories, without creating a scale to be validated. For this reason we didn't check the reliability of the generated dimensions.

We notice that, when selecting sources of information, young tourists have three categories in mind: sources that are considered to be specialized in the field, people's voice and general advertising. The second dimension, People sources, is the most preferred as two of the three items that compose it are in the top three preferred sources of information (as we discussed above, Table 1).

Also, we investigated a travel planning comparison between using Internet and travel agencies (Table 2).

Comparing with travel agencies, Internet is more used for travel planning. For domestic trips (inbound trips) 71.2% of students used Internet and only 19.9% used the services of a travel agency. For outbound trips, 53.5% used Internet comparing with 36.6% who used services from a travel agency.

Table 2 - Use of Internet and/or travel agencies in travel planning

Travel plans	Never	Yes, for domestic trips/inbound trips	Yes, for outbound trips
Use Internet	7.4%	71.2%	53.5%
Use services from a travel agency	51.4%	19.9%	36.6%

The percentage of young people who didn't use Internet is a lot smaller than the one corresponding to those who didn't ask for help from a travel agency.

We also investigated how useful is the Internet comparing with travel agencies in planning a travel trip. On a scale of 1 to 5, the respondents evaluated the utility of instruments/tools in planning a trip (1- Not at all useful; 2 – Not useful; 3 – No Opinion; 4 – Somewhat useful; 5 – Very useful) (Table 3).

Table 3 - Utility of Internet/travel agencies in planning travel trip activities

	Internet (mean)	Travel Agency (mean)
Inform about tourist destinations	4.61	3.35
Inform about transport means	4.27	3.43
Inform about accommodation	4.38	3.65
Inform about tourist attractions	4.61	3.41
Average – information	**4.48**	**3.44**
Reservation of accommodation	4.06	3.80
Booking transport	3.94	3.74
Average – booking	**4.01**	**3.76**
Buy airline tickets	4.18	3.73
Buy tickets for road/rail transport	3.66	3.56
Average – buying	**3.92**	**3.66**
General average	**4.25**	**3.60**

Internet is considered to be more useful in information activities (4.48), especially for tourist destinations (4.61) and tourist attractions data (4.61). Another important utility is for buying airline tickets (4.18). Also Internet is useful for reservation of accommodation (4.06) and booking transport (3.94).

Travel agencies are useful especially for reservation of accommodation (3.80), booking transport (3.74) and buying airline tickets (3.73). In order to investigate if Internet is generally considered to be more useful than travel agencies in planning travel trip activities, we created two new variables that compute general average for items referring to Internet and travel agencies. The general average for Internet utility is 4.25. The general average for travel agency utility is 3.60. We wanted to check if the differences discussed above are significant. The differences are significant between the following instruments/tools: *Inform about tourist destinations; Inform about transport means; Inform about accommodation; Inform about tourist attractions; Buy airline tickets* (sig < 0.05). The results are presented in Apendix A- Table 4. Even if there are differences in favor of Internet for all the tools, the significant differences are

only for the first category (information) and one tool in the buying category (airline tickets). All the other differences are not significant

As a result of the analysis above, we expect to find significant differences between Internet and agencies only for the **information** average. The significant differences are only for the first category – *inform* (sig < 0.05). So Internet is considered to be more useful for information activities then travel agencies. The other categories are not significantly different as a comparison between Internet and agencies. As an overall view though, Internet is considered to be more useful when using instruments/tools in planning trip activities. The results are also presented in Apendix A- Table 5.

Objective 2. Defining the students' tips planning behaviour

At the end of the questionnaire we places three questions in order to understand the young tourists' trip planning behavior. We investigated three aspects: what individuals influence them when planning a trip; what means of transportation they prefer for a trip; what accommodation places they prefer in a trip.

a. Individuals

As we can see in Table 6, most respondents (80%) are influenced by friends when planning a trip. About half of them are influenced by family overall or family members (spouse). We have to consider the fact that the sample we used is not relevant to the entire population, as we only investigated students that, most of the time, are not married and not living with families. But still, we notice that students are open to close people's opinions more than other sources.

Table 6 - Individuals that influence when planning a trip

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	%	
Friends	167	32.6	80.7
Spouse	108	21.1	52.2
Family	86	16.8	41.5
Travel Agency Staff	20	3.9	9.7
People from mass-media (VIP's, TV moderators)	15	2.9	7.2
Other	114	22.2	55.1
People that already visited that place	3	0.6	1.4
Total	513	100.0	247.8

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

b. Means of transportation

According to Table 7, most preferred transportation means are cars and planes. This does not necessarily mean they would actually travel by car or plane, as preference is not always equivalent to

what is actually bought. Preference has to be correlated with the buying power of the buyers. We also might consider touristic destination they want to reach (domestic or abroad/inbound or outbound).

Table 7 - Preferred means of transportation

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Train	73	19.3	35.3
Car	133	35.2	64.3
Minibus/Bus	58	15.3	28.0
Plane	112	29.6	54.1
Other	2	0.5	1.0
Total	378	100.0	182.6

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

c. Accommodation

According to Table 8, most students prefer to stay in hotels and guesthouses when traveling. Surprisingly, few young tourists (11%) would prefer a tent as accommodation

Table 8 - Preferred accommodation

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Hotel	132	45.2	64.4
Guesthouse	135	46.2	65.9
Tent	24	8.2	11.7
Other	1	0.3	0.5
Total	292	100.0	142.4

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

CONCLUSION

Sources of information most preferred are reviews on the Internet, opinions of friends, families or colleagues and specialized sites of tourism. Internet is considered to be more useful for information activities than travel agencies. The most confident source of information is clearly the recommendations of the people that were already to that place. As booking methods, students use most often the phone and the Internet in the same measure.

Men are more confident in using the Internet as a source of information than women are. Most young tourists are influenced by friends when planning a trip. The preferred transportation means are cars and planes.

Confirmation and disconfirmation of research hypotheses

H1: The Internet offers more useful tools in planning a trip than the travel agencies do

Internet is more used by young tourists in planning trips than travel agencies are. Internet is considered more useful in the documentation stage ("Inform about tourist destinations", "Inform about transport means", "Inform about accommodation", "Inform about tourist attractions") and when buying

airline tickets. H1 is confirmed.

H2: Young tourists are more influenced by friends when planning a trip

Most respondents (80%) are influenced by friends when planning a trip. H2 is confirmed.

H3: Young tourists prefer planes as means of transportation for a trip

The preferred transportation means are cars and planes. H3 is partially confirmed.

H4: Young tourists prefer hotels and tents as

accommodation places for a trip

Most students prefer to stay in hotels and guesthouses when traveling. H4 is partially confirmed.

Practical implications. Managers should focus on information placed on the Internet for touristic offers for young tourists. Tourist agencies have to focus on placing information on credible Internet sources and to deliver value to their actual clients. Agencies need to focus on always delivering real information to all clients and potential clients. Men are more confident in using the Internet as a source of information than women are.

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APPENDIX A

Table 4 - Paired Samples Test for Internet/travel agencies utility

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Inform about tourist destinations - Internet - Inform about tourist destinations - Travel agency	1.254	1.560	.116	1.025	1.483	10.813	180	.000
Pair 2	Inform about transport means- Internet - Inform about transport means- Travel agency	.840	1.664	.124	.596	1.084	6.790	180	.000
Pair 3	Inform about accommodation- Internet - Inform about accommodation- Travel agency	.733	1.677	.125	.487	.980	5.868	179	.000
Pair 4	Inform about tourist attractions- Internet - Inform about tourist attractions- Travel agency	1.203	1.509	.113	.980	1.427	10.611	176	.000
Pair 5	Reservation of accommodation- Internet - Reservation of accommodation- Travel agency	.263	1.819	.136	-.006	.531	1.932	178	.055
Pair 6	Booking transport_Internet - Booking transport_Travel Agency	.206	1.884	.140	-.072	.483	1.464	179	.145
Pair 7	Buy airline tickets_Internet - Buy airline tickets_Travel Agency	.452	1.871	.141	.174	.729	3.215	176	.002
Pair 8	Buy tickets for road/rail transport_Internet - Buy tickets for road/rail transport_Travel Agency	.105	2.143	.159	-.209	.419	.659	180	.511

Table 5 - Paired Samples Test for information, booking and buying averages

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	average_inform_inter - average_inform_ag	1.03592	1.34070	.10164	.83531	1.23653	10.192	173	.000
Pair 2	average_rez_int - average_rez_ag	.24859	1.73297	.13026	-.00848	.50566	1.908	176	.058
Pair 3	average_buy_int - average_buy_ag	.26571	1.79542	.13572	-.00216	.53359	1.958	174	.052
Pair 4	average_general_int - average_general_ag	.64470	1.31217	.10215	.44299	.84640	6.311	164	.000