

## SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ACTIVITY OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS. THE CASE OF BUCOVINA REGION

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### **Abstract**

*The changes intervening in the information technology field, especially in the Web 2.0 terms, have activated the communication, promotion and collaboration between suppliers, business partners and consumers of touristic services alike. All these changes led to the development of new marketing practices oriented on the online area, which represent nowadays a cornerstone in designing an economic activity of a tourism organization which aims to consolidate its position in the section market.*

*The necessity of existence and operationalization of a clear guidance of online promotion is a trend that, at least for now, has not been adequately exploited by the tourism units from Bucovina region (situated in North of Romania). The online growing competition – as it breaks the conventional barriers at a local, national and international level – constrains the tourism operators to develop a coherent policy of Social Media Marketing (SMM). Therefore, the major aim of this study is to highlight the level of the reception structures in Bucovina through the online visibility filter and, implicitly, their acquaintance with the techniques, strategies and promotion methods specific to the Social Media.*

*In order to analyze the level of development and evolution of the accommodation in Bucovina in terms of their visibility on Social Media, in July-August 2012 period, we undertook a survey that targeted 518 tourist accommodation units. For the purpose of highlighting the evolution of the phenomenon studied, namely the impact of the internet and hence the Social Media on the marketing activity of the receiving structures concerned, the initial study was repeated annually, in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.*

*The analysis conducted reveals that managers of tourist reception units in Bucovina have minimal knowledge about Facebook and Twitter and their use. Therefore, they do not yet have a well-grounded strategy of promotion in these environments.*

**Key words:** *Social Media, Bucovina, Accommodation units, Website, Facebook, Twitter.*

**JEL Classification:** *L83, M30, M31.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In tourism, as in other industries, consumer preferences are changing rapidly and tourists are becoming every day more demanding and less willing to compromise. Taking into consideration that the development of the tourism sector in the last century quarter was made at pace with the enhancing of virtual environment and the diversifying of the communications

system on the internet, today, we can say without any doubt that tourism is a global phenomenon which constantly monitors trends in technology and uses willingly these vectors.

The new information technologies have been and are still at the center of economic and social change influencing obviously on the world, but by far the largest impact on the hospitality industry plays Internet as it is “global, interactive, flexible, dynamic, accessible to a broad audience and abounds in resources of all kinds” (Grossek, 2006, p. 11).

Thus, the presence in the virtual space must be a compulsory component of tourism activity for the following reasons (Stanciu, Costea, 2012, p. 46):

- it is a relatively cheap and accessible environment for promotion, with measurable outcomes;
- use of Internet in Romania and, in general, across the world is growing exponentially;
- the Internet offers an extremely broad geographical coverage;
- very good targeting of user segments;
- the mere presence in the online environment lends credibility to the organization of tourism;
- permanent visibility throughout the campaign, which gives extra vitality to traditional media promotion.

Many of interactions with customers are now managed on the Internet and tourism businesses are dependent on each other in terms of cooperation for benefits via the same communication medium - the Internet (Sevrani, Elmazi, 2008).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Akehurst (2009, p.51) considers that tourism organizations, especially the agencies and accommodation units were subject to serious challenge with the development of the Internet, but at the same time, have faced the immeasurable opportunities. Today, in this competitive environment of business, every manager of tourist accommodation units wants efficient distribution of services, more customers and respectively more profit (Mirkevaska, Sekulovska, 2008, p. 36).

Evolution of the Internet has led to reconsideration of tourism marketing approaches, or more, to develop new practices and concepts; businesses have been added a new prefix thus becoming new ones, like e-business, commerce slides to e-commerce and the Internet has quickly become the scene to conduct electronic marketing: e-Marketing (Grossek, 2006, p. 47). Thus, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2004, p.106), electronic marketing is an integral part of electronic commerce and consists of "efforts of the company to present, promote and sell products and services over the internet".

The innovation of the Internet domain was the emergence of the concept of Web 2.0 technology which implies that information would not be transmitted anymore on the channel one-to-many (typical phenomenon of concept WEB 1.0, represented the emergence and development of "classic" websites) in read-only format as called by Borges (2009), but many-to-many, more specifically, the content is generated directly by users. Web 2.0 is the term popularly used for advanced technologies and applications related to the Internet, including blogs, podcasts, social networks etc. (Lai, Turban, Scholz, 2008). Social networks are

*really easy to use and very powerfull as marketing instrument (Scott, 2015, p.2).*

*Requires to be emphasized that Web 2.0 does not necessarily involve the use of information technologies completely new, recently issued, but refers to technologies and instruments that exist for a while but which, through a creative use and extensive improvements, came to the public's attention, gaining the huge popularity it enjoys today. The proof is the fact that since 1979 appeared a first social network as a system of discussion among Internet users, which was called Usenet, the creation of Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis of Duke University (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).*

*Currently, we are witnessing an exponential increase in instant chat services and email and social sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+ (Van Dijck, 2013). If e-mail services and electronic messaging have become in a relatively short time indispensable for tourism activities, socializing web-sites seemed initially to have no relevance for organizations in tourism since the information contained in these sites was perceived as unstructured, inconsistent in terms of content and irrelevant to the tourism sector (Stanciu, Costea, 2012, p. 47).*

*Today more and more tourist accommodation units, travel agencies, other tourism service providers and consumers use social networks - Facebook, Twitter - to communicate with the target audience and promote themselves. Inevitably arose a new concept, Social Media Marketing (SMM), a process focused on internet marketing, which relies mostly on the community from the virtual society (Kim Ko, 2011).*

*Richter and Koch (2007) believe that Social Media is a set of online applications or platforms that target to facilitating interaction between users, collaboration and content sharing. Furthermore, Social Media can be considered as the fastest and most efficient method of information transfer, promotion of tourism products and services, increasing the number of actual and potential customers.*

*Presence on social networks is the next step that all organizations need to do including those in the tourism sector. The reason is as simple as can be - Internet users like to socialize and tend to consider rather the opinions of others about products or services than what is being transmitted through traditional advertising on television or in other media (Casalo, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2010). Now, every day, millions of people express and share through simple text messages their thoughts, emotions and experiences with their circle of friends in Social Media (Park et al., 2015). These interactions in Social Media can become an important source of information for any company that knows how to exploit them. Moreover, the interest, for brands, of users active in social media is quite high. It is important to note that social media have changed how buyers and sellers interact, and increased involvement through social media may yield positive results for sales organizations.*

*Beginning as a social network among young students of Harvard University (Phillips, 2007) Facebook site has grown rapidly into one of the most important media marketing companies (Mangold, Faulds, 2009) which intend to bring to their advantage a large audience, but, the authors note, especially diverse. Ashley Tuten (2015) shows that as long as there are being used the correct marketing strategies, the social network users are willing to engage, interact and provide feedback on the services provided by a travel company.*

*Another extremely popular social network is Twitter that has come to be known because of users, in turn famous, like the Hollywood stars (Wakefield, Wakefield, 2016). Twitter is the easiest way through which you can share links to different pictures or videos, or various messages, called statuses or tweets, but which number of characters does not exceed 140 (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010, p. 591). Although limiting the number of characters per post could be considered an impediment to defining promotional strategies that a company would like to implement, the strategic use of this rule can turn into a real public relations department, as well emphasized in literature by specialized authors such as Porter, Sweetser and Chung (2009), Smith (2010) Lovejoy, Waters and Saxon (2012), Xifra and Grau (2010), Saffer, Sommerfeldt, Taylor (2013), and others.*

*Like a few years ago, when managers of tourism had to explain the advantages of a website company presentation on the Internet, today it is necessary that all those involved in the tourism industry to be talking about Facebook, Twitter and about their countless commercial advantages (Hansson, Wrangmo and Solberg, 2013; Maurer, Wiegmann, 2011; Shen, Bissell, 2013). It is important to note that social media have changed how travel products producers and consumer interact, and increased involvement through social media may yield positive results for tourism companies in terms of sales (Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu and Krush, 2016).*

*Therefore, both Facebook and Twitter should be regarded with attention by tourism companies, because social media is increasingly becoming the place where people gather and present their experiences in different tourist destinations (Munar, Jacobsen, 2014). Thus, Social media networks might become a database of travel experiences or even a public registry of suggestions and complaints, companies being obliged therefore to react quickly to preserve their reputation (Dekay, 2012). Gregoire, Salle and Tripp (2015) show that social media can transform the ways in which customers communicate with companies following service failures: "while there is a positive side to this phenomenon, there is also a negative side, which can lead to serious social media crises". In addition, Mukkamala et al. (2015) show that crises in social media involve big challenges for travel companies in terms of their rapid rate of spread and potential persistent negative associations in terms of brand*

*parameters. Although the lack of presence in Social Media does not result in a capital loss, lack of this environment certainly leads to bypassing an opportunity to enhance it (company capital).*

*Some hotel chains have encouraged visitors to post comments on the website, blog or Facebook page of the hotel, instead offering discount vouchers (Price, Starkov, 2006). Inevitably raises the question of credibility. Are these blogs / messages on Facebook written by real consumers or tourists? Mack, Blose & Pan (2008) say that nothing can beat the credibility offered by the power of the word (word-of-mouth), and blogs / Facebook pages, whether personal or corporate, are perceived to be less reliable. However, the practice often refutes this claim. The degree of receptivity to information from social networks is greater than the credibility given by "word-of-mouth", specific for classical sites, whereas in case of Social Media, the information comes from a circle of friends and not from unknown users, as it was the case with sites ranging from WEB 1.0 (Svensson, 2011).*

### III. MOTIVATION OF INVESTIGATION

A starting point in compiling this study was the fact that in recent years, local authorities in Suceava (the tourist destination Bucovina overlapping in terms of territory across almost all Suceava County) organized numerous activities to promote tourism in the Bucovina region: "Christmas in Bucovina", "Easter in Bucovina", "Pilgrim in Bucovina", financed initially through the Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013, Axis 5 - sustainable development and tourism promotion and continued thereafter with funding from local budget, but these efforts have however had a limited resonance nationally and especially internationally.

"Christmas in Bucovina", perhaps the most publicized program of recent years has not led to a significant increase in the number of tourists in accommodation establishments in the county, as estimated and announced immediately after completing the program by local officials. For example, according to data from the Department of Statistics Suceava in January 2011, so immediately after completing the most publicized event of its kind in recent years in Suceava - "Christmas in Bucovina" in December 2010, this index of net capacity tourist accommodation in operation was 20,1% versus 21,7% in November 2010. The same data, predictably revealed another aspect, namely, that of the total arrivals in the establishments of tourist reception in Suceava, 95,6% were Romanian tourists' arrivals and foreign tourists' arrivals were only 4,4%.

About these programs of promoting tourism in the county has been a lot of talking in recent years, both in print and on radio and television, but in all this media mix, the Internet was used to an extremely low extent. And now, as then, we believe that a program of the "Christmas in Bucovina" figures (budget) ought to

benefit from a promotional component developed exclusively online. Given that Bucovina as destination or the big events organized to promote this destination are not present on the Internet, there are neglected from start a good deal of potential tourists seeking information in cyberspace, before choosing the destination in which will spend holidays.

We assume that one of the possible factors that influence the conversion rather low of tourists by tourism promoting programs organized by local and county authorities is the minimization of the Internet as a medium to promote tourism, both from decisions at local government level and at the level of private tourism organizations.

#### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the level of development and evolution of the accommodation in Bucovina in terms of their visibility on the Internet in July-August 2012 period, we undertook a survey that targeted 518 tourist accommodation units (Table 1). For the purpose of highlighting the evolution of the phenomenon studied, namely the impact of the internet and hence the Social Media on the marketing activity of the receiving structures concerned, the initial study was repeated annually between August 2013, August-September 2014, August 2015 and August 2016.

**Table 1. Types of accommodation units in Suceava County that were targets in the research**

Category	No. of targeted structures for analysis	Classification			
		*	**	***	****
Hotel	46	1	8	26	11
Pension / Guest house (touristic and agrotouristic)	417	7	138	219	53
Caban / Chalet	34	1	20	13	0
Other categories (hostel, camping etc.)	21	1	4	15	1
Total	518	10	170	273	65

Source: authors

This study focused to emphasize the impact of the Internet in the promotion policy of accommodation units and highlighting the familiarity of Bucovina hospitality industry operators with the latest online marketing techniques and tools specific to virtual social environment.

When setting the target group were considered absolute data taken from Suceava County Tourist Breviary, editions of 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, the data obtained from the websites of tourism salutBucovina.ro (helloBucovina.ro) and turistinfo.ro and also information obtained empirically, analyzing sites and Facebook and Twitter accounts owned by accommodation establishments in the county of Suceava.

For this research we took into account the following objectives and hypotheses:

O1:Determination of online visibility of the accommodation units in Bucovina, including their presence on social networks;

H1:Less than half of the total tourist accommodation structures in Bucovina have their own presentation website. The presence of the pensions on social sites is quite shy, tour operators are not familiar with Facebook or Twitter.

O2:Estimating the importance that accommodation units in Bucovina, grant for integration on its website of social media elements;

H2:Most of the accommodation units in Suceava do not make it a priority to implement on their websites the social media elements, such as Facebook Like Box, "Sharing" buttons etc.

O3:Determine the updating level of Facebook pages or the popularity on social networks (Facebook, Twitter) of receiving units in Bucovina;

H3:We estimate that less than half of the total studied receiving units award great importance to updating their Facebook pages. Thus results the low popularity for the majority of accommodation units both on Facebook and Twitter.

#### V. RESEARCH RESULTS

Although not a strict rule, we consider that before to plan an intensive presence in social media, tour operators should primarily be present on the Internet through a website, because it is the starting point for the process of defining the goals and strategies of online marketing on medium and long term.

According to the study carried out initially (in the year 2012), less than half (45,95%) of total tourist accommodation structures in Suceava county had their own website presentation, while 54,05% were not aware in pragmatic terms what is the usefulness of such promotional tool. Although in 2013 we found a modest increase of 2,94% in the number of sites presentation, at the level of 2014, the presence of tourist reception units has experienced a significant decline of 9,38% and next years the situation remained almost unchanged (+ 0.45% in 2015) (Table 2).

**Table 2. Evolution of on-line presence through web sites of the accommodation units**

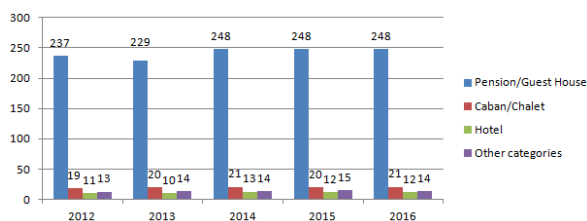
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of accommodation units that own a website	238	245	222	223	223

Source: authors

Annually can be noticed an occurrence of new sites belonging to receiving units in Bucovina, but at the same time, other sites are inoperable or disappear entirely. For example, compared to 2013 in 2014 we

have found 10 new sites for accommodation units belonging to the county, but in the same time were closed no less than 33 of the existing sites in 2013. The analysis conducted found out that the disabling of most sites was caused by delayed payments of hosting service, which led to the temporary suspension of service, either because of major disruptions of platforms that were built on the sites concerned. *Under these conditions, we estimate that the number one hypothesis is confirmed.*

We note that in 2016, 84,06% of total tourist accommodation units in Suceava which do NOT have site are guest houses and agrotourism pensions. Consequently, it is likely that tourists get distorted information concerning these accommodation units from other sources - friends, travel agents, tourism boards, web portals etc. - rather than the hotels (4,06%) or chalets (7,11%). The benchmarking in the period 2012-2016 is shown in Figure 1.

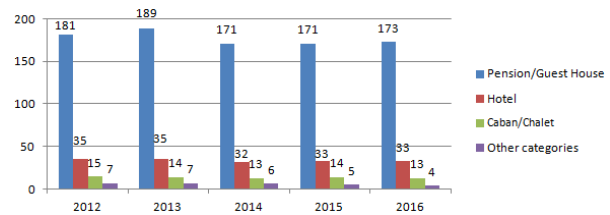


**Figure 1 – Accommodation units that do NOT own a presentation website**

Source: authors

Among the units that do not have their own sites, 57,62% are in rural areas, most of them being in places known and appreciated nationally: Humor Monastery (10,47%) and Voroneț (8,1% ). On the other hand, Vatra Dornei holds 21,62% of the total urban guest houses without site, while the town-Gura Humorului holds for nearly 9%.

In 2016, the total tourist accommodation structures which benefit of the marketing intake generated by their own website presentation, 77,5% are guesthouses, out of which 12,5% are classified by the Ministry (www.turism.gov.ro) with 2 flowers/stars, 43% with 3 flowers/stars, and 21% with 4 flowers/stars. In terms of hotels category, out of care facilities that have their own sites, their share is 14,80%. So, hotels classified with a star hold 0,45% of total establishments, the 2-star hotels have 0,90%, hotels categorized with 3 stars represent 9,42%, while the 4 star hotels comprise a percentage of 4,03%. The relatively significant decrease in the number of guesthouses and agritourism pensions with own website after the year 2013 is justified amid general decrease in the number of sites in absolute values by 22 to 23 units and given that this type of accommodation it is the most representative in the investigated area (Figure 2).



**Figure 2 – Accommodation structures that own a presentation website**

Source: authors

The major differences between the number of pensions and the number of units belonging to other categories (hotel, cottage, etc.) which do have or not their own website presentation show that regarding Bucovina as the tourist destination, the typology for accommodation units is dominated by guest houses and agritourism pensions, hotels representing 8,7% of total units with accommodation functions. This is due to the fact that Bucovina presents nature based tourism potential and anthropogenic potential strongly concentrated in rural areas, where construction of new hotels has been supported by numerous opportunities for grants, especially with the opening lines of funding under the SAPARD program (Program special Pre-Adreare for Agriculture and Rural Development), continued by other EU funding programs for the financial years 2007-2013 and 2014-2020.

Regarding the integration of Social Media elements on sites (Facebook Like Box, buttons "Sharing"), according to the study undertaken, only 37,66% of the total tourist accommodation structures which have been the subject of research in 2015 and 2016, understood how these elements work and how they can help improve the work of the unit, other reception units have been neglecting these essential aspects of effective promotion campaigns. Compared with previous years, it can be noticed an increase of 13,51% (compared to 2014), 21,73% (compared to 2013) and 147,05% (compared to 2012) the number of site that have elements, in the range, of Social Media, Facebook or Twitter, Google+ etc. (Table 3).

**Table 3. Evolution of implementation of Social Media elements on the website of accommodation units from Bucovina**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	N	N	N	N	N
Websites with Social Media elements	34	69	74	84	84
Total websites	238	245	222	223	223

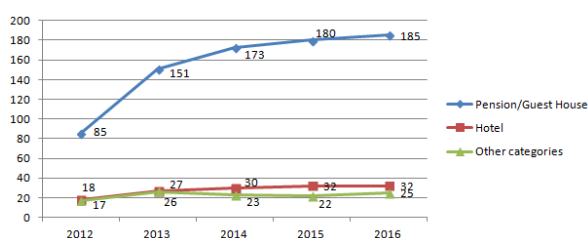
Source: authors

Thus we can observe a real tendency to increase the use of these elements, which shows a growing interest shown by owners of units in Bucovina for internet promotion via Social Media. *However, since only 37,6% out of the total accommodation units in Bucovina make a priority the implementation on their*

websites of Social Media elements, we consider that hypothesis number 2 is confirmed.

Currently, in Romania there are over 9.5 million Facebook users, of which 50% are women and 50% men. Of the total number of Facebook users, about 90% are adult (aged 18+). Also, according to Facebrands statistics of April 4, 2018, the penetration rate of Facebook into population is 44,44% and into the total Internet users in Romania, by 85,4%. These figures indicate how important it is for an economic entity the use of social networks to make the brand known or to promote a tourism product.

According to the research, in 2016, 46,71% of total tourist accommodation units in Suceava have an account or a Facebook page. Of these, 76,44% are boarding houses, hotels 13,2%, and 10,3% other types of tourist accommodation units. The evolution of tourist reception units' presence from Bucovina on Facebook by category in the period 2012-2016 is shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 – The presence by category of tourist reception units from Bucovina on Facebook**  
Source: authors

In terms of environmental origin, in 2015, 55,98% of the total for accommodation units holding Facebook pages comes from rural areas, justified by the degree of concentration of a large part of the total accommodation units in rural areas. On the other hand, 44,02% of the total accommodation units holding Facebook pages from urban areas, cities with a significant share in this respect are Vatra Dornei, Gura Humorului and Suceava.

Compared with 2012 as the basis for reporting there was a significant increase in the number of accommodation units which choose to be present on Facebook to promote the brand and hence the provided touristic products / services, but also reveals that the annual growth rate it is on a downward trend, if we consider basic clues chain (Table 4).

**Table 4. The evolution of accommodation units presence on Facebook**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of accommodation units present on Facebook	120	204	226	234	242

Source: authors

More important than mere presence on Facebook is by far the work that entities develop in this

environment. So, in terms of updating Facebook pages (info, photos, offers, etc), in 2016, only 42,14% of the analyzed tourist reception units have upgraded their administered pages regularly. Although the number of Facebook pages administered by reception units in the area has increased annually the level of updating the pages with new information and offers has not changed significantly (Table 5), on the contrary, the annually degree of updating pages is declining, at least in the period between 2013 and 2015, which demonstrates us that a majority of the units analyzed, approach superficially this medium of promotion. *In those circumstances, the assumption (hypothesis) that less than half of the total of reception units studied attach great importance to updating their Facebook pages is confirmed.*

**Table 5. Evolution of upgrading level of Facebook pages**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Active Facebook pages	57	112	110	97	102

Source: authors

In terms of the number of "fans" (likes), on 10 August 2012 the most popular Facebook pages of local tourism were those of hotels Best Western Bucovina in Gura Humorului (7202 likes), Hotel Carol in Vatra Dornei with 2383 likes and Continental Hotel in Suceava likes 1541. In the year 2013 the most popular Facebook pages were those of hotels Toaca Bellevue with 23532 likes, Best Western Bucovina with 7485 likes, both located in Gura Humorului, respectively hotel Carol page with 3379 likes in Vatra Dornei. In 2014, the first position in terms of popularity on Facebook remained Hotel Toaca Bellevue with 28676 likes, second position followed by Hotel Dorna with 10436 likes and Hotel Best Western Bucovina with 9223 likes (Table 6).

A fulminant evolution experienced hotel Toaca Bellevue page, which although in August 2012 was ranked 8th (538 likes) in the top 10 most popular Facebook pages in about 12 months (until resuming research 2013) has succeeded to place first in the ranking with over 23000 likes, which implies an monthly average increase of approximately 1900 likes. Thus, in the present Toaca Bellevue Hotel is the most appreciated touristic structures on Facebook in the last three years, ranking only in first position. Also, a performance was registered also by Dorna Hotel 4\*, which managed in the three years to increase its popularity online, the number of assessments (like sites) increased approximately 40-times during this time.

**Table 6. Top 10 most appreciated reception units from Bucovina on Facebook**

<i>Po siti on 20 16</i>	<i>Po siti on 20 14</i>	<i>Po siti on 20 12</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Like 2012</i>	<i>Like 2013</i>	<i>Like 2014</i>	<i>Like 2015</i>	<i>Like 2016</i>
1.	1.	8.	Hotel Toaca Bellevue	4*	Gura Humorului	538	20532	28676	28713	28754
2.	2.	11.	Hotel Dorna	4*	Vatra Dornei	327	663	10436	13297	20483
3.	3.	1.	Hotel Best Western Bucovina	4*	Gura Humorului	7202	7485	9223	10261	11403
4.	4.	-	Hotel Sofia	4*	Sucevita	-	324	4921	6491	7834
5.	-	-	Pensiunea Iristar	4*	Fălticeni	-	-	-	6115	7801
6.	-	-	Pensiunea Poiana Izvoarelor	3*	Vatra Dornei	-	-	-	6068	7244
7.	5.	-	Pensiunea Lidana	4*	Vama	-	-	4874	6002	7053
8.	9.	-	Pensiunea La Filuta	4*	Mălini	-	-	3501	5430	6835
9.	-	-	Pensiunea Cris	3*	Dorna Arini	-	-	-	5298	5330
10.	-	-	Pensiunea David House	4*	Rădăuți	-	-	-	4840	4899

Source: authors

From the developed analyzes, we find that only 4-5 of tourist reception units achieve annually to retain a position in the top of popularity on Facebook, other ranking positions are occupied each year by other structures that meet significant increases in the number of assessments.

In terms of visibility for reception units in Bucovina on the social network Twitter, the results are not at all encouraging. According to the survey conducted in 2016, only 4,44% of total tourist accommodation units in the area have a Twitter account. The much lower use of this social networking by the managers of local tourism is due, most likely, to slightly lower popularity of the Twitter community in Romania, compared to Facebook. Dynamic analysis reveals a trend of slight increase in the use of Twitter in the period 2012-2014 followed by a sharp drop of 28,12% in 2015 (Table 7). In terms of origin, the tourist receptions that are present on Twitter are distributed roughly equally between urban and rural areas.

**Table 7. Evolution of touristic reception units presence on Twitter**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. units present on Twitter	7	23	32	23	23

Source: authors

In terms of popularity of tourist reception units on Twitter, only four units - Continental Hotel in Suceava, Best Western Bucovina in Gura Humorului, Pension Lidana in Vama and Dor de Bucovina in Campulung have over 100 people who are following their pages (followers), ie users who are interested in new offers, pictures, news on the activity of the receiving structure in question (Table 8). By far, the Continental hotel chain is best in terms of updating with new information the Twitter page, with over 1600 messages posted from account opening. Also very active on Twitter is Toaca Bellevue Hotel with over

1200 messages that have been posted. It is alarming that only two entities are concerned with regular updating of accounts' information (new posts) which translates the same general lack of interest in improving online visibility through this media vector (tool).

**Table 8. Four of the most popular reception units in Bucovina on Twitter**

<i>N o</i>	<i>Reception unit</i>	<i>Classifi cation</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>2016</i>	
				<i>Follow ers</i>	<i>Posts</i>
1.	Hotel Continental	3*	Suceava	524 (+17,22 %)	1646
2.	Hotel Best Western Bucovina	4*	Gura Humorului	187 (+5,65 %)	33
3.	Pensiunea Dor de Bucovina	2*	Câmpulung Moldovenesc	156 (32,2%)	226
4.	Pensiunea Lidana	4*	Vama	126 (+20%)	4

Source: authors

Approximately 66% of the analyzed tourism operators which promote themselves through their own website also have Facebook pages. It is notable and worrying at the same time, that only four tourist accommodation units in Suceava have a continuous presence in Social Media, both on Facebook and on Twitter: Hotel Continental in Suceava, Hotel Toaca Bellevue in Gura Humorului, Dor de Bucovina in Campulung, respectively Grandparents House (Casa Bunicilor) in town Humor Monastery.

## VI. A STATISTICAL APPROACH OF THE STUDIED PHENOMENON

*Testing the differences between averages of data for 2016 year*

At the surveyed community level there are 80 tourist establishments holding their own website



presentation, but do not show the updated list of tariffs. These units are also Facebook users, the average number of received likes being about 752 per receiving unit, with a standard deviation of 1073 likes / tourism unit (Table 9).

The number of units that use the Facebook application and displayed on its website a list of tariffs is 100. The average number of likes received by these tourist reception units via the Facebook is about 1942 likes / tourism unit, with a standard deviation of 3420 likes / tourism unit.

**Table 9 – Differentiation of the averages for the number of “Like” rating regarding the existence on the accommodation unit’s website of the offer/price list**

Group Statistics					
	Offer/price list	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Like	Website doesn't implement the facility	80	752,19	1073,277	119,996
	Website implements the facility	100	1942,14	3420,520	342,052

*Source: authors*

Levene's test indicates that the distributions of number of likes for the two categories of tourist units, above, has no equal dispersion. Interpretation of T test value, for the case of samples that have no equal dispersions, indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the averages of likes received by the tourist facilities which have on their site a list of tariffs in comparison to those that do not have this information posted on their websites.

At the researched community level are 131 tourist units using the Facebook app on their websites but do not present a translation of the information posted in other international languages. Average number of likes received by these accommodation units through Facebook is about 890 likes / tourism unit with a standard deviation of 1144 likes / tourism unit (Table 10).

**Table 10 – Differentiation of the averages for the number of “Like” rating regarding the availability of international language content information on the accommodation unit’s website**

Group Statistics					
	Choice for the international language information on the website	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Like	Website doesn't implement the facility	131	889,63	1143,940	99,947
	Website implements the facility	49	2813,22	4587,478	655,354

*Source: authors*

The number of units using the Facebook app which have on their website the information available in one or more foreign languages is 49. The average number of likes received by these accommodation units via the Facebook is about 2813 likes / tourism unit with a standard deviation of 4587 likes / tourism unit.

Levene's test indicates that the number of likes distributions for the two categories of tourist units, above, has no equal dispersion. Interpretation of T test value, for the situation of samples that present no equal dispersions, indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between averages of likes received by the tourist facilities sites that have on their website information translated into other international languages in comparison to those who do not have this information posted on their websites.

At the investigated community level are 93 tourist units using the Facebook app but do not have their own site available for online booking form. Average number of likes received by these accommodation units via the Facebook is about 644 likes / tourism unit with a standard deviation of 752 likes / tourism unit. The number of units using the Facebook app which have available on their website a form for online reservations is 87. The average number of likes received by these tourism units via the Facebook is about 2235 likes / tourism unit, with a standard deviation of 3651 likes / tourism unit, a situation that can be observed in Table 11.

**Table 11 – Differentiation of the averages**

	Booking form	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Like	Website doesn't implement the facility	93	644,15	751,769	77,955
	Website implements the facility	87	2235,44	3651,081	391,437

**for the number of “Like” rating regarding the availability of an online booking form on the accommodation unit’s website**

*Source: authors*



Levene's test indicates that the number of likes distributions for the two categories of tourist units, above, has no equal dispersion. Interpretation of T test value, for the situation of samples that present no equal dispersions, indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between averages of likes received by the tourist facilities sites that have on their website a form for online booking in comparison to those which do not have this facility available on their websites.

At the investigated community level are 118 tourist units using the Facebook app but do not have on their own site available elements for Social Media (sharing buttons, Facebook likebox). Average number of likes received by these accommodation units via the Facebook is about 824 likes / tourism unit with a standard deviation of 1094 likes / tourism unit.

The number of units using the Facebook app and which also have available on their website elements of Social Media is 62. The average number of likes received by these tourism units via the Facebook is about 2534 likes / tourism unit, with a standard deviation of 4155 likes / tourism unit (Table 12).

**Table 12 – Differentiation of the averages for the number of “Like” rating regarding the availability Social Media elements on the accommodation unit’s website**

Group Statistics					
	Social Media elements availability	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Likes	Website doesn't implement the facility	118	824,10	1094,406	100,748
	Website implements the facility	62	2534,60	4155,145	527,704

Source: authors

Levene's test indicates that the number of likes distributions for the two categories of tourist units, above, has no equal dispersion. Interpretation of T test value, for the situation of samples that present no equal dispersions, indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between averages of likes received by the tourist facilities sites that have on their website elements of Social Media in comparison to those which do not have this elements fo Social Media available on their websites.

In conclusion, all these dichotomous variables related to the facilities of accommodation units' websites may explain the differences between the total

of likes received by the tourism units analyzed.

In order to deepen the analysis regarding how these variables influence the variation in the number of likes is required also the use of a regression analysis method.

*Regression analysis of the distribution of popularity on Facebook*

The following variables: submission of the offer / price list on the website, site availability in one or more foreign languages, implementation of a reservation form on the website and the integrating Social Media elements, were used individually and in combination, as predictors of variation in the number of likes in the regression. Data processing was performed using SPSS computer software ver. 20. In order to identify the best predictions (model) we used the selection process "step by step" (stepwise regression). They detained two models: one that kept one predictor and the second which includes the combined influence of two predictors (Table 13).

**Table 13. Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,317 <sup>a</sup>	,101	,096	2575,027
2	,377 <sup>b</sup>	,142	,133	2521,692

a. Predictors: (Constant), Website in foreign languages

b. Predictors: (Constant), Website in foreign languages, Integration of Social Media elements

The first model has kept into analysis the predictor that managed to explain variation in the number of likes in the largest proportion compared with all other predictors integrated in the analysis individually. Dichotomous variable - the availability of international language website has explained a 10% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The number two model shows the combined influence of two predictors, with the dichotomous variables: availability in the international language of the website and integration on website of Social Media elements. This model was able to explain 14% of the variance in the dependent variable.

ANOVA assignment revealed that the values calculated for correlation coefficients are significantly different from the null value, which indicates the identification of valid statistical models (Table 14).

**Table 14. ANOVA Analysis**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	131954360,459	1	131954360,459	19,900	,000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	1180275843,202	178	6630763,164		
Total	1312230203,661	179			
2 Regression	186699359,936	2	93349679,968	14,680	,000 <sup>c</sup>
Residual	1125530843,725	177	6358931,320		
Total	1312230203,661	179			

a. Dependent Variable: Likes

b. Predictors: (Constant), Website in foreign languages

c. Predictors: (Constant), Website in foreign languages, Integration of Social Media elements

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	889,626	224,981		3,954	,000
	Website in foreign languages	1923,599	431,206	,317	4,461	,000
2	(Constant)	587,622	243,178		2,416	,017
	Website in foreign languages	1468,666	449,839	,242	3,265	,001
	Integration of Social Media elements	1236,330	421,361	,218	2,934	,004

a. Dependent Variable: Likes

Interpreting the coefficient values obtained for model no. 2, the one that succeeds in explaining the highest proportion of variation in the number of likes, we can conclude the following findings:

- The average number of likes of the tourism accommodation units which have not implemented the 2 facilities captured by the independent variables is 588 likes / tourism unit.
- Tourist accommodation units that fail to translate their website content in other international languages achieve an average surplus for 1469 likes.
- Tourist accommodation units that integrate on their website social media features succeed to supplement the average number of likes by 1236.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS, RESEARCH LIMITS AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

It is obvious that information and communication technology, namely the Internet, is at the heart of both economic and social changes, which put their mark on contemporary society deeply.

The current context makes it impossible to develop modern tourism without internet connection. So, along with the expansion of the virtual marketing, tour operators have been subjected to great challenges, but at the same time, were the beneficiaries of the extraordinary opportunities that lie in the instant

exchange of information and the global nature required for Internet.

The analysis conducted reveals that managers of tourist reception units in Bucovina have minimal knowledge about Facebook and Twitter and their use. Therefore, they do not yet have a well-grounded strategy of promotion in these environments.

Among administrators / managers in the hospitality industry in Suceava is persisting a preconceived idea that presence and promotion on Social Media is just the privilege of major hoteliers. Contrary to expectations, small entrepreneurs in tourism have the most to gain from previously mentioned social networks. Although during the four years of research, we found increases in regard of visibility of the receiving structures in social media (particularly Facebook), these developments have, for the most part, a quantitative character and much less qualitative.

We appreciate, however, that the online visibility of the accommodation units in Bucovina suffers and therefore it is imperative for urgent action to allow creating and implementing marketing strategies consistent in order to improve all aspects related to promoting tourism in the virtual media.

Undoubtedly quantitative analysis methods, especially qualitative ones used in the research can be inevitably influenced by the biases and subjectivism of researchers or possible errors of perception and reception of information. Although there were covered all structures with accommodation functions for tourists in the destination of Bucovina, the results

reflect only a descriptive picture of the phenomenon of Social Media and its implications at the level of local tourism activity, with no possibility or intention to generalize the results in other tourist areas.

Another limitation of the research is that it can not assess to what extent the popularity of accommodation units in Social Media is an organic result obtained naturally or maybe is a result gained through paid advertising campaigns. Based on this limitation, a future research should provide a way to assess the organic popularity and paid popularity, separately.

This research does not necessarily claim to present in an exhaustive manner all the issues of Social Media and its implications in increasing tourist activity, but wants to represent a simple argument to convince the actors in the hospitality industry, to begin a

systematic study of online marketing and implicitly of Social Media Marketing in a continuous and professional approach.

We believe that there are a number of prospects of further development of this study in ways such as the design and implementation of an adjoining research based on an instrument of inquiry by which to determine any correlations between the stage visibility and activity of tourist reception units in Social Media and the views of decision makers about the importance and usefulness of this tool and broadening research towards analyzing the implications of Social Media in tourism also through the other elements of a more technical nature, but also in territorial plan by studying the phenomenon in other tourist destinations in Romania or abroad.

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