

Chapter XXVII

Social Aspects of Mobile Technologies on Web Tourism Trend

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes how the development and use of mobile and Web technologies are changing the way to search information, to plan, to buy, and to travel. The new technologies are changing several aspects of our life, such as the way in which people work, buy, learn, travel, and how they relate to each other; and so on. The tourist sector certainly represents one of the most dynamic markets, able to capture innovations and opportunities provided by the Web, in such a way that gets to be an out-and-out model of e-business. Internet access now is not restricted to personal computer. In fact the use of mobile devices is becoming increasingly important. The chapter's goal is to analyze social implications of Web applications and mobile devices and how they are improving the attitude of the customers both the fruition of tourism services and to development of sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of Internet and Web technology in every aspect of our daily life has brought great change in the consumers habits in any field but mainly in the tourism sector. Every year, million of tourists approach to Internet in order to find tourist information: vacations, flights, guides, last minute, cruises, destinations and routes. This situation is changing the concept of tourism. In particular, tourism was defined by the World Tourism Organisation as “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than

one consecutive year for leisure, holidays, business, health treatment, religion and other purposes”.

A new concept of “intelligent tourism” is spreading, based on all those innovative technological solutions offered by Web that allows achieving information on cultural, artistic and other kinds of natural interest.

The Web imposes itself more and more as relevant reference and indispensable resource in the tourism sector both for customers and tourism companies, thanks to undisputed advantages such as:

- Speed for information exchange,
- Improvement of interaction among people located in different places,
- Improvement of information sharing, knowledge and services availability for all the users.

These above three aspects are very important because they are producing the markets globalisation and the spatial and of temporal boundaries break down. Moreover the information and knowledge production and sharing improves both quality development of social inclusion. Moreover, the success of the Web and mobile technologies in the tourism sector is given by very competitive prices, but also by the ability to differentiate the offer, by the improvement of possibility to reach the market niches and by proposing new services with a good usability degree. The user is not a passive subject and when s/he visits a business site s/he knows that s/he will not be able to find negative aspects of a choice. This has brought to the creation of virtual communities where users share their own travel experiences with other tourists and where the potential tourist consumer finds relevant information. The tourist seems in fact to prefer descriptions and testimonies of other people that have already visited that place.

In the next sections we introduce the passage from the old economy to the new economy in tourism sector, in particular we describe how the advent of e-commerce has marked the passage from traditional travel agencies to Internet. In succession we describe the different tools tourist used for Web and mobile and their social aspects. Finally we describe the new scenarios of tourism using the new technologies and how the mobile devices can develop the sustainable tourism, increasing both tourism demand and tourism supply.

FROM TRAVEL AGENCIES TO ONLINE TOURISM E-COMMERCE

The tourism initially involved an elite activity. In the last years it has been becoming a mass phenomenon shared by million of people all over the world, and it has been becoming one of most relevant economic sector of most countries. Data provided by World Tourism Council (1997), in fact talk of seven hundred million of arrivals of tourists all over the world. The tourism represents the 7% of the total occupied people and the 2% of global gross domestic product. It is a dynamic phenomenon, mutable and complex, it can be defined as a “social fact”, it changes with transition of tendencies, of orientations, of necessities and needs of society.

In the past tourists had to go to the travel agencies, i.e. in the physical commercial places where to plan and buy a travel. These agencies execute activities of reservation and selling of single tourism services or services packages confectioned by Tour Operators. This means that people, have to go to a physical place to use such services. The choice of the agency can be limited by the physical distance. Moreover services obtained depended by operators, by their personal skills and by their limited information.

When tourists visit different locations guidebook can be very useful. The paper guidebooks more frequency used by tourist in the old economy. Even if they are still now the principal tool used by travellers, because it is easy to consult and information is well structured, they have a lot of limits. Information in tourist paper guidebooks can be outdated because items written many years before could not be updated, hotels and other tourist activities could be ceased (Schwabe, 2005). Actually the new Web and mobile technologies can provide more timely and complete information than paper guidebooks. In fact user can obtain an updated answer to her/his question, more than a paper guidebook and improve the information quality and consequently the travel quality.

Thanks to technology innovation of the last thirty years, not only users have obtained several advantages but also the tourist companies. The most innovative ones in fact, can actually be able to redefine their own organization structure and relationship with partners, optimising the operating costs and improving the quality of services.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have allowed tourism companies to increase their efficiency and their market value. In fact ICT offer the chance to share data-bases with other organizations and other customers' information resources and services. Besides ICT allow to optimize other internal functions, either lowering costs and by expanding services to offer (Poon, 1993).

In latest three decades the tourism sector has been characterized by three technological phases: Computer Reservation System in the 70s, Global Distribution System in the 80s and Internet Revolution since the second half of 90s. (Buhalis, 1998). The first two have allowed to create, to develop and to globalize availability of services by travel agencies, who have exclusive access to automatic booking systems. The last phase has allowed the customer to perform bookings by themselves, redefining the entire business tourism system, modifying the same tourism fruition and improving the tourist experience. (Stipanuk, 1993).

The first change registered in tourism market according to these technological evolutions is a great increase of e-

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