Chapter 13
Knowledge Management and Social Media in Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims to provide an overview of the role of social media for knowledge management in tourism industry. Respect than traditional tools, the social media penetration within such industry is growing thanks to opportunity for travelers and travel professionals to access critical tourism knowledge everywhere and every time. Prior research has mainly focused on how social media are changing the tourism industry, while it is lacking enough the contribution of these technologies to managing touristic knowledge. This chapter seeks to shed light on how social media support knowledge management, with particular attention to knowledge creation, sharing, and preservation processes, in tourism industry. In particular, while knowledge creation and sharing process have attracted the attention of scholars, knowledge preservation via social media seems be still in its infancy stage.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter aims to provide an overview of the role of social media for knowledge management in tourism industry.

According to Davenport and Prusak (1998, p. 5) knowledge is defined as "a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insights that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates in and is applied in the minds of knowers". This perspective focuses on the dynamic character of knowledge, that is conceived both as an outcome and a process for "incorporating new experiences and information" (e.g., Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001;

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Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The managerial literature agrees that one of the major problems of knowledge is its exploitation. Often individuals and organizations possess an enormous amount of information, but they are not able to exploit it for getting sustainable competitive advantage. When organizations operating in non-traditional markets and/or information-intensive industry, the management and processing of knowledge are considered even more critical factors for sustainability and organizational survival.

Knowledge management is a process that enables organizations to identify, capture and effectively leverage collective knowledge in an organization (Von Krough, 1999). It consists of various sets of socially enacted "knowledge processes," such as knowledge creation (known as contraction or development), knowledge sharing (known as transfer, distribution or dissemination), and knowledge preservation (known as storage and retrieval). Knowledge management, and the managing of explicit or tacit and individual or collective forms of knowledge, has been investigated by various authors from many countries and disciplines. However, while managerial literature mainly focuses on the process of knowledge management, with the aim of understanding how organizational knowledge can and should be managed effectively, the Information Systems (IS) literature pays more attention to the tools – traditional or Information Technology-assisted (IT-assisted) – for creating, sharing and preserving such knowledge. The IS literature recognized the IT-assisted tools as enablers of knowledge creation, sharing and preservation (e.g., Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Sher & Lee, 2004; Pezzillo Iacono, Martinez, Mangia, & Galdiero, 2012, Agrifoglio, 2015). Respect than traditional tools, IT-assisted tools, and social media in particular, are increasingly providing novel ways of supporting processes of knowledge creation, sharing and preservation within and between organizations.

Social media have been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The literature agrees that social media are a set of the Internet-based applications based on the peer-to-peer communication, which enables the creation, collaboration and exchange of information between organizations, communities and individuals (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media are playing an increasingly important role as information sources for organizations and individuals in various industries, such as tourism. Tourism is an information-intensive industry whereby social media usage was recognized as critical in many aspects and for different levels. In particular, social media enable to exchange information between travellers and industry suppliers (e.g., hotels, transportation sectors, attractions), intermediaries (e.g., travel agents), controllers (e.g., governments and administrative bodies) (Werthner &Klein, 1999). Thanks to social media, the enormous amount of information is now exploitable for improving many aspects of tourism, especially in information search and decision-making behaviours, tourism promotion and in focusing on best practices for interacting with consumers (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). More in general, the considerable adoption of social media has extended organizational boundaries of companies operating in tourism industry, changing the way their communicate, collaborate and managing knowledge. For these reasons, growing role of social media in tourism has been increasingly an emerging research topic (e.g., Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

This chapter focuses on the role of social media for knowledge management in tourism industry. In particular, it seeks to shed light on how organizations, destinations and, more in general, tourism sector create, share and preserve tourism knowledge. The structure of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, we introduce the theoretical background on knowledge management (Section 2) and on knowledge management issues in tourism industry (Section 3). Furthermore, we provide an overview of the role of social

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