Social Media Marketing in Tourism

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Social Media Marketing in Tourism

Case of Croatia

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Zagreb, September 2019

ANDREA BOTICA

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Contents

Abstract

Social media has made a huge impact on the tourism industry. Tourists engage with social networking sites to research trips, make informed decisions about their travels and share their personal experiences of a particular hotel, restaurant or airline.

Today in the era of fast technological development, successful tourism destination management is hard to achieve without proper media presence. Communication and marketing strategies have to meet the demand of modern tourists that want personalized approach customized by his/her needs. This is especially important for millennials when choosing their travel destination.

This paper analyses the effect of social media influence on the three phases of travel decision making process: the pre-, during and post-travel phase. It gives an insight into strategies employed by Croatian Tourism Agencies that have proven to be successful in the recent years. Finally, the paper proves the success of the campaigns through the infamous TOMAS research.

1. Introduction

Over the last century, we have experienced a radical shift in how business is conducted and how people interact, communicate and share content. The introduction of personal computers, the Internet and e-commerce have had a tremendous impact on the business operations and the marketplace. As new technologies became available, businesses learn how to use them to gain great benefits. The access to new technologies at affordable prices has revolutionized the ways in which businesses operate today; it is rapidly changing the interaction of brands and customers.

The use of Internet and other information communication technologies leads to a new era of the economy. "The Internet is a global wide area network that connects computer systems across the world."[1] The internet enables the provision of online services, such as the web, which is "a collection of billions of webpages that you can view with a web browser".[2] Social media, also an internet service, as one of most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into a part of social and economic life in the real world. The term social media can be defined as: "Many online tools that allow people with similar interests to share information and learn from others or network in an open process."[3] It includes social networking sites, blogs, micro blogs, consumer review sites, content community sites, wikis, internet forums and location based social media. It has emerged as the new way in which people connect socially, by integrating information and communication technology (such as mobile and web-based technologies), social interaction and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. It is actually more than a new way to communicate; rather it refers to an entire online environment built on people's contributions and interactions.

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[1] Tech Terms. (n.d.). Internet. Retrieved from https://techterms.com/definition/internet [25 September 2019]
[2] Tech Terms. (n.d.). Internet. Retrieved from https://techterms.com/definition/internet [25 September 2019]
[3] Wilson, S. (2010). *Social media and small business marketing*. Seattle, Washington: CreateSpace.

In a short span of time, social media has become one of the most loved mediums for the youths today and because of that social media marketing is the most popular new marketing concept that every business owner should include in their operations because it's generating value for their businesses. The introduction of new digital technology is accelerating and we can expect it to have a similar impact on businesses now and into the future.

Social media has also made a huge impact on the tourism industry. It plays a significant role in pre-trip planning, on-the-trip decision making and post-trip organization, feedback and review systems. The greatest and probably most popular use is in the aforementioned first phase: the inspiration phase. Tourists, "a person who is visiting a place for pleasure and interest, especially when they are on holiday", 4 engage with social networking sites to research all the necessary destination information, make informed decisions about particular accommodations, restaurants or transportation means (such as airlines, bus or train companies, rental car services, etc.) and ultimately sharing their personal experiences. Tourism destination is "agglomeration of companies and organizations involved in producing and marketing the overall tourism product within a geographical area; strategic unit providing all necessary resources whose integrated activities allow tourists with the kind of experiences they expect" [5] therefore leveraging social media to market tourism products and services is an excellent strategy to promote tourism destinations.

This paper examines the importance of social media in the tourism and travel industry. It shows how effective extensive advertising and marketing campaigns are shaping the decision making process (primarily inspiration) when choosing a travel destination.

In the second part, there is an analysis of the role of social media marketing in Croatian tourism. It shows the examples of marketing campaigns that mainly focused on social media

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[4] Collins dictionary. (n.d.). Tourist definition and meaning: Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/tourist [25 September 2019]

[5] IGI global dictionary. (n.d.). What is Tourism Destination. Retrieved from https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/big-data-analytics-for-tourism-destinations/40349 [25 September 2019]

advertising, that have ultimately brought numerous new tourism business to the Croatian market.

The methods of research used throughout this paper are primarily of a qualitative nature, with focus on secondary data available online, such as research conducted by the Croatian National Tourism Board. Furthermore, using research under the name of TOMAS from the years 2014-2017, the paper explores the correlation between the trends and structure of tourists throughout the previous years, and ultimately concludes that a relationship between the results and the use of social media marketing campaigns in promoting Croatia as a tourist destination indeed exists, and is of a successful nature.

2. The Role of Social Media in the Tourism Industry
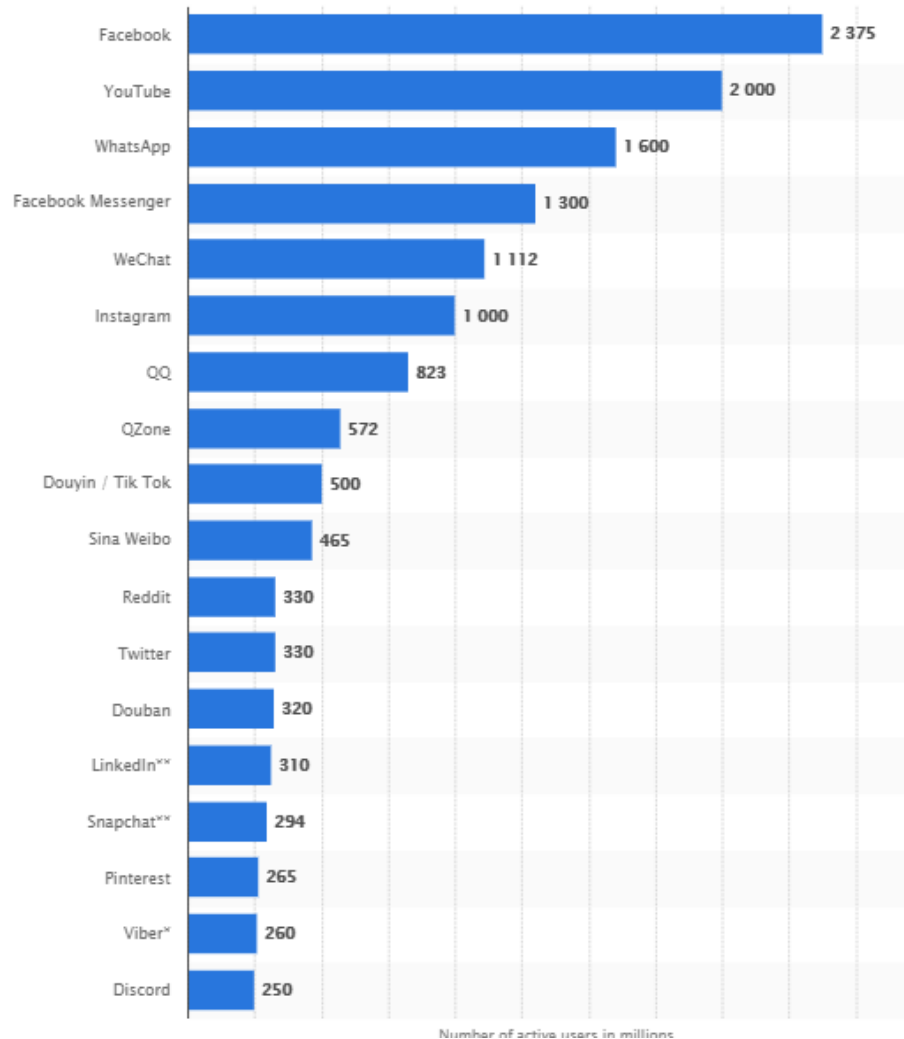
"Travel is an inherently social act."[6]

Nick Ostdick

Any tourist, at any given time, even when alone, is not *really* alone. He or she is constantly surrounded with thousands of other travelers, be it in airports, stations, hotel lobbies or online. Yes, the online world has become integrated into the everyday lives of humans on Earth, and is no longer considered simply a "trend". Social media websites and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have transformed the way people interact and communicate amongst themselves. This has been known for quite some time. What is somewhat of a newer revolution is the way in which these sites have shifted the way in which companies engage and provide products and services to their customers. Today social media platforms are being used by tourists to aid throughout the entire decision making process of choosing a destination, package, flight or hotel, to purchasing it, to choosing activities to participate in upon arrival, and finally leaving feedback and honest opinion of the entire process.[7] It is no surprise then that online travel agencies, tour operators, and even national tourist boards are shifting towards social media as their primary tool in communicating with and marketing to existing and future customers, 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week. Those who opt to neglect the importance of social networks and social media marketing strategies are on the road towards failure.

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[6] Ostdick, N. (2016, April 12). The Importance of Social Media in Today's Travel Industry. Retrieved from http://www.dcsplus.net/blog/the-importance-of-social-media-in-todays-travel-industry [10 September 2019]

[7] Ostdick, N. (2016, April 12). The Importance of Social Media in Today's Travel Industry. Retrieved from http://www.dcsplus.net/blog/the-importance-of-social-media-in-todays-travel-industry [10 September 2019]

Figure 1: Most popular social networks worldwide ranked by number of active users (in millions) July 2019[8]

Social Network	Number of active users in millions
Facebook	2 375
YouTube	2 000
WhatsApp	1 600
Facebook Messenger	1 300
WeChat	1 112
Instagram	1 000
QQ	823
QZone	572
Douyin / Tik Tok	500
Sina Weibo	465
Reddit	330
Twitter	330
Douban	320
LinkedIn˟˟	310
Snapchat˟˟	294
Pinterest	265
Viber˟	260
Discord	250

Facebook currently has well over 2 billion active daily users, followed by Youtube with 2 billion. Instagram has been experiencing massive growth compared to previous years, with users uploading more than 100 million photos and videos daily, according to data published by Sprout

[8] Statista. (2019). Global social media ranking 2019. Retrieved from
https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/ [19 September 2019]

Social.[9] Social media platforms and various applications are where today's modern traveler chooses to portray their reality. This is when it becomes clear than even when traveling *solo*, the person is, in fact, far from alone. Social media users share their tourists desires and actual experiences in real time by posting photos, videos, links and other content, that can afterwards be *liked* and sent on further, or shared, by other users on the platform. With the introduction of the infamous *hashtag* (portrayed with the pound symbol: *#*) users are able to mark content with a specific theme and be part of a unified global conversation concerning a certain topic – be it a country, a city, an event, an election, or literally anything else.

Apart from the social media landscape changing, another change is seen in today's average tourists, yet again pushing marketers into shifting their strategies to effectively target this new group of consumers. Millennials are the most sought-after demographic in the entire travel industry. They are also the cohort that most difficult to target. Millennials seek individualized travel experiences that are tailored to their needs and wants, while at the same time being affordable and flexible. Furthermore, millennials avoid traditional communication channels, such as radio, television and print, and instead maintain an enormous digital presence on social media, both in their personal and professional lives. According to recent studies, millennials check their mobile devices an estimated 45 times per day, 80% of them citing that Facebook serves as an inspiration for future travel planning.[10]

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[9] Zote, J. (2019, September 5). 65 Social Media Statistics to Bookmark in 2019. Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-statistics/ [19 September 2019]

[10] Ostdick, N. (2016, April 12). The Importance of Social Media in Today's Travel Industry. Retrieved from http://www.dcsplus.net/blog/the-importance-of-social-media-in-todays-travel-industry [10 September 2019]

Taking into account the above mentioned, it is only logical that tourism marketers form and utilize a robust social media strategy that enables two-way communication with this hard-to-reach demographic, and one that leverages its enormous potential to distribute offers, updates and notifications without investing heavily in resources and personnel.

3. The Pre-/During/Post-Travel Phases

3.1. The Future Tourist's Pre-Travel Phase

These days the way that tourists are utilizing information through their decision making process has changed. Social media sites became the best source for large amount of information that is relevant to their needs and it became an important research tool for vacationers. From social sharing sites such as Facebook, Instagram to crowd sourced reviews sites like TripAdvisor, potential tourists are browsing the Internet for travel inspirations and validation from their peers. There, they can easily find other tourists photos, videos, ratings, recommendations, check – ins and much more. That information is easy to attain and it serves to preview the in-person experience that the destination has to offer from the viewpoint other than that of the specific brand. All that user generated content can serve as an inspiration to all digital users to take on an adventure.

More and more tourists determine their travel plans based on that same content posted online. More than 44% of digital users strongly agree that Internet reviews posted by travel bloggers helped them about the initial decision of vacation destinations. This is followed by 37% online travel forums, 27% Facebook, 24% Youtube/Vimeo, 22% Pinterest. [11] Since that kind of marketing is low-cost and bias-free, it represents an advantage for marketing communications.[12]

Facebook is one of the prime destinations for sharing life events and travel related content. 52% of users surveyed said their friend's photos inspired travel plans, and 76% post their

[11] Živković, R., Gajić, J., & Brdar, I. (2014, November 14). THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISM - Sinteza. Retrieved from http://portal.sinteza.singidunum.ac.rs/Media/files/2014/758-761.pdf [19 September 2019]
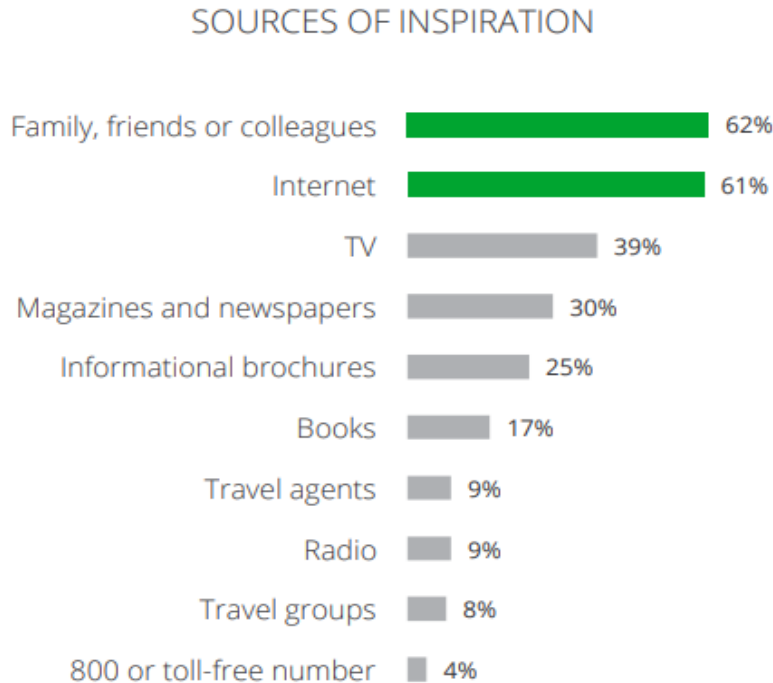
[12] Kotler,P., Kartajaya,H., Setiawan,I. (2010). "Marketing 3.0.", John Wiley&Sons,inc, New Jersey

vacation photos to social networks. During vacation research, 55% of those surveyed liked pages relating to the trip they were planning. [13]

By posting humorous posts, breathtaking images, interacting with consumers who reach out and creating brand advocates and with real time images shared during events, tourists will often be inspired to attend event or attraction they hadn't plan before.

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[13] Brown, R. (n.d.). The Impact of Social Media on Travel Inspiration. Retrieved from https://www.olapic.com/resources/the-impact-of-social-media-on-travel-inspiration_blog-p1aw-f1tr-v1th-t1sm/ [21 September 2019]

Figure 2: Sources of travel inspiration[14]

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Family, friends or colleagues	62%
Internet	61%
TV	39%
Magazines and newspapers	30%
Informational brochures	25%
Books	17%
Travel agents	9%
Radio	9%
Travel groups	8%
800 or toll-free number	4%

Before selecting a final travel destination user seek information to get the idea of where to go, what to do on their vacation/holiday. They turn to their friends, family, colleagues but also to online influencers within expanding social media to find inspiration. Just on Pinterest, there are more than 25 000 pins that have words 'Travel inspiration' in the description[15] and more than 2 million posts on Instagram.[16] The user generated content accumulated by travel blogger or just by people posting their travel experience is valuable when making a decision and often impact
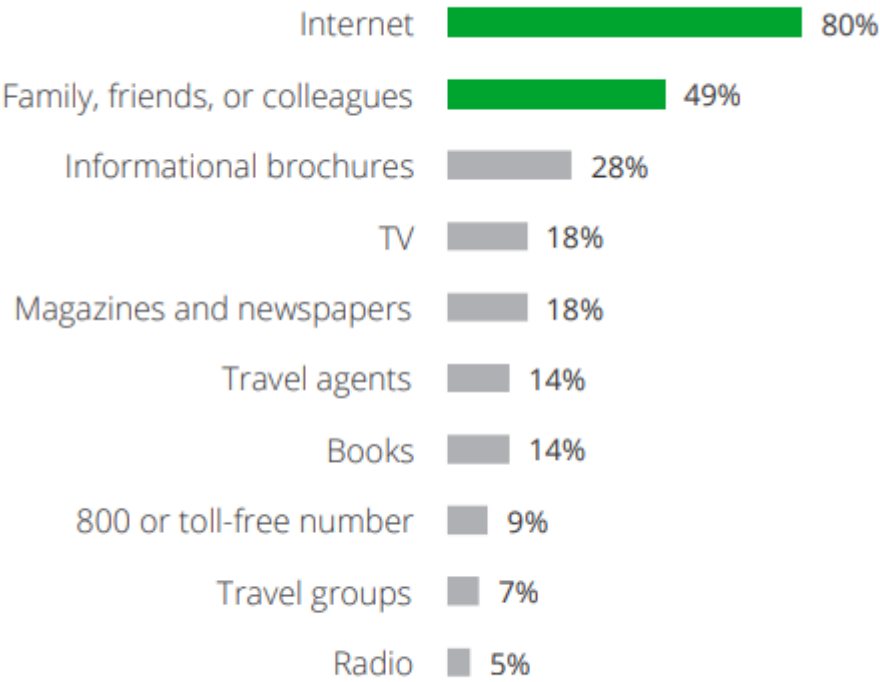
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[14] Google . (2013). *Think with Google - The 2013 Traveler*. Retrieved from
file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/2013-traveler_research-studies.pdf [19 September 2019]

[15] According to data from www.pinterest.com [19 September 2019]

[16] According to data from www.instagram.com [19 September 2019]

the initial decision to make a trip among younger generations. They rather trust fellow travelers and their up to date information then official itinerary of travel agencies.

Figure 3: Travel planning sources[17]

Internet is essential when planning a trip, the same as for trip inspiration. There are so many sites and apps that help modern traveler to organize and plan the travel, that there is no need to book the travel agency when is so easy to do it yourself. From accommodation booking sites

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[17] Google . (2013). *Think with Google - The 2013 Traveler*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/2013-traveler_research-studies.pdf [19 September 2019]

(AirBnb, Booking.com), flight searches engine (Sky Scanner, SkipLagged) to restaurant locators (Zomato) everything became easier.

A popular planning website among millennials is Foursquare. It offers incredible number of personalized functions and allows searching for nearby attractions based on distance from the current location, ratings or personalized estimate of traveler's taste. It also has the ability to follow other travelers who have similar taste, read their reviews and adding personal insight about the specific destination to help future travelers. The ability to create and save all information in the profile means that all the preferences, saved location will be available pre or during trip phase.[18]

Another popular social media platform is TripIt, accessed through the same-named mobile application. It organizes all the travel details and information into a master itinerary for every trip in just one place. Tourists just send their reservations details and TripIt does the systematic arrangement of travel confirmations, flight itineraries, tickets, accommodation info, rental car reservations, ferry tickets and even driving directions. The site also allows sharing trip plans with other people who require the app for mutual coordination. All of this information is available anytime (in real time) anywhere, on any device and it is free of charge.[19]

The table presented below shows the top online travel activities of potential tourists before actually going on a trip. According to the table, around 60% of leisure tourists and more than 65% business tourists are researching an upcoming trip through tourist's reviews, destination descriptions and multiple flight offers. Observing the below presented, it is easy to conclude on the importance of online reviews from previous tourists, compared to other social media sources. 42% of leisure and 55% of business tourists would agree (see table 4).

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[18] Poirier, G. (2017, November 21). What Is Foursquare & How Does It Work? Retrieved from https://smallbusiness.chron.com/foursquare-work-28728.html [25 September 2019]

[19] TripIt. (n.d.). A single (free) itinerary created for you in seconds. Retrieved from https://www.tripit.com/web/free [25 September 2019]

Figure 4: Top online travel activities[20]

Leisure travelers | | **Business travelers**

| Leisure	Activity	Business
59%	Researched an upcoming trip	67%
42%	Read reviews from other travelers	55%
43%	Researched a destination, flight, hotel or vacation as a result of seeing an online ad	54%
42%	Brainstormed or started thinking about a trip	48%
30%	Watched a travel video	47%
31%	Requested more information related to an upcoming trip	45%
27%	Looked at travel content or reviews by friends or family	39%

3.2.   The Traveler's Social Media Presence During Travel

While at destination, social media became the trusted source of all information that isn't available in the guidebooks (see figure 6). Tourists turn to social media sites because quick information access on the spot leads them to interactive resources that can immediately provide answers about any uncertainty or inquiry they might face. They can utilize their social media accounts while traveling to get tips and recommendations. Facebook, for example, introduced an interesting feature where users may post about their desire for recommendations about a certain aspect of their trip ("hot" locations, restaurants, museums, clubs and sights), and others may offer their insight. Furthermore, users are

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[20] Google . (2013). *Think with Google - The 2013 Traveler*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/2013-traveler_research-studies.pdf [19 September 2019]

given the option of recommending or *not* recommending certain locations, based on a 5-star rating system.

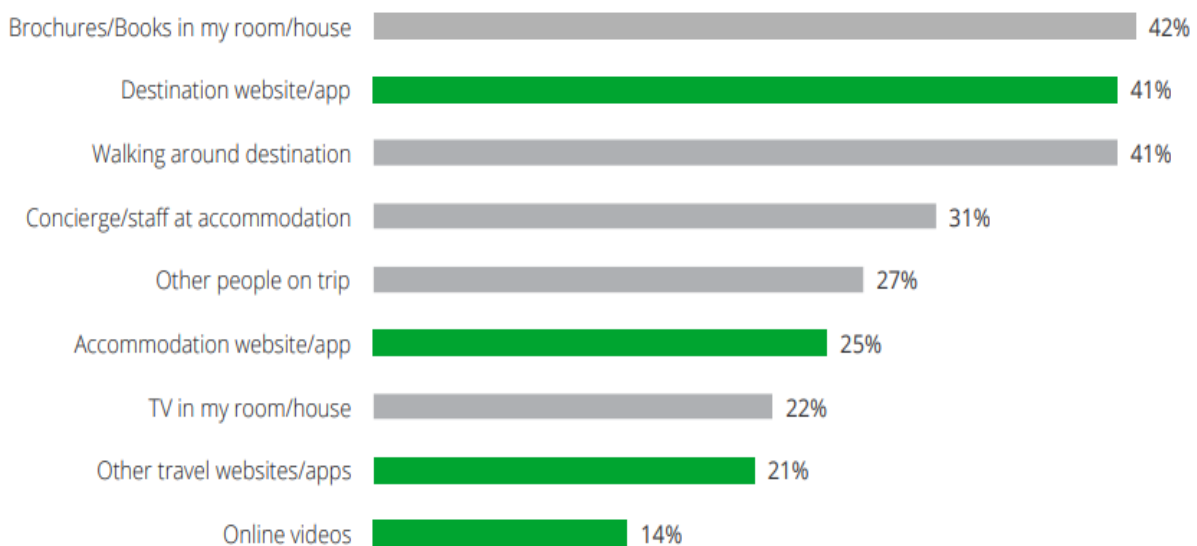*Figure 5: The most used social media apps while at the destination[21]*
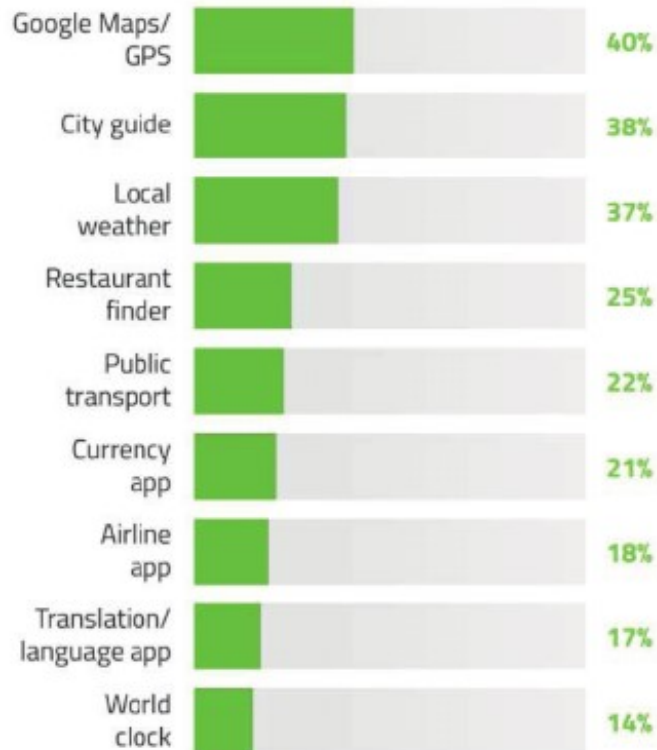
According to the table above, from those tourist who are "socially active", the majority of them are likely to download travel apps while planning their vacation before they go. During

[21] Živković, R., Gajić, J., & Brdar, I. (2014, November 14). THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISM - Sinteza. Retrieved from http://portal.sinteza.singidunum.ac.rs/Media/files/2014/758-761.pdf [19 September 2019]

vacation, the most popular application is (with a figure of 40%) Google Maps followed by city guides, local weather, restaurant finder apps and public transportation apps.

Digital users in tourism can interact and share information with other tourists/friends using different platforms (blogs, forums, wikis, video and photo sharing to social networks, virtual communities, chat rooms and podcasts). The most popular activity during and post vacation among tourists is sharing self-made videos or photos.

Figure 6: Top sources used for activity decisions while at destination[22]

Brochures/Books in my room/house	42%
Destination website/app	41%
Walking around destination	41%
Concierge/staff at accommodation	31%
Other people on trip	27%
Accommodation website/app	25%
TV in my room/house	22%
Other travel websites/apps	21%
Online videos	14%

Data from the table above shows the top sources for exploring destination offers on the spot. The data highlighted in green portrays all what is conducted by the tourist *online*. 41% of all tourists use the official destination's website or app, while 21% use other tourist's websites and

[22] Google . (2013). *Think with Google - The 2013 Traveler*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/Andrea/Downloads/2013-traveler_research-studies.pdf [19 September 2019]

apps. Travelers, of course, still rely on *offline* sources, but a shift in the balance between the two is leaning towards a stronger online presence as the year's progress.

3.3.   Post-Travel Social Media Presence

The post-vacation phase is no less important than the previously mentioned phases. Actually, data produced by *Sinteza* and the University of Belgrade shows that, in fact, almost 25% of proactive tourists write their vacation reviews upon their return home, versus only 20% of them who do it during their vacation. [23] The traveling experience does not end upon the end of the trip itself, and maintaining a social media presence even afterwards is important in the life of any social media user, but also to the entire social media system of accumulating user-generated data. Travel companies, brands and tourist boards encourage post-trip opinion expression.

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[23] Živković, R., Gajić, J., & Brdar, I. (2014, November 14). THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TOURISM - Sinteza. Retrieved from http://portal.sinteza.singidunum.ac.rs/Media/files/2014/758-761.pdf [19 September 2019]

4. Examples that Modernized the Croatian Tourism Industry

4.1. "Croatia, Full of life" Marketing Campaign

"Full of life" is the new marketing campaign the Croatian National Tourist Board used in October 2015, as a part of slogan rebranding. The old slogan: "Mediterranean as it once was" brought a hefty number of tourists to the country in the last 15 years. However, its downside was the fact that it was only promoted in conventional media, such as TV channels, radio and print. It portrayed Croatia as a relaxing and calm destination, filled with years of history and blue seas. It made it seem ideal for quiet family holidays. However, what indeed changed is the profile of today's modern tourist, who needs and wants more than just an iconic landmark or a calm atmosphere. Today's millennials demand something that is unique, different; something that provides and experience that can be shared with their friends, families and followers online; something that is *instagrammable*.

The new campaign initially revealed a one minute video portraying a variety of things to do in Croatia under the slogan „Full of life". The marketing perspective was changed and now targeting moved toward young people who are looking for unique experience, adventures and eventually are frequent social media users. The video indeed showed something *instragrammable*.

This time around Croatia's Tourist Board completely changed its marketing techniques and now mainly focuses on advertising on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. There are greater possibilities of reaching a larger target audience and it's relatively cheap compared to previous marketing efforts. The official Instagram and Facebook profiles of Croatia's Tourist Board have more than half a million followers who are active on a daily basis and engage in discussion. The hashtags *#croatiafulloflife* and *#croatia* were introduced and enabled the sharing of tourists photos and videos as an inspiration or recommendation on

coming to Croatia. There are more than 1 million posts with the mentioned hashtag used alongside user generated content, which heavily increased Croatia's media presence. A true "buzz" was created.

A year after the launching of the official campaign, the Croatian National Tourist Board has conducted extensive market research in June in 2016 which included 4,840 respondents from eight major source markets – the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Poland.[24]

The research was carried out with an aim to assess the effectiveness of the integrated communication activities and confirm progress of key communication messages created within the communication concept entitled "Croatia, Full of Life". In addition to the evaluation of marketing and public relations campaigns, the current image of Croatia as a tourist country was analyzed as well.

Research demonstrated that marketing activities related to Croatia, when all markets were taken into account, were noticed by 43% of tourists. These were mostly activities involving television (20%) and internet (19%). Compared to the survey conducted last year, there has been a significant shift in terms of penetration of the communication messages about Croatia. In 2015, 31% of travellers noticed marketing activities.[25]

The survey covered key communication routes that also show significantly better results than in the previous year, 2015. For example, regarding the message that Croatia is full of diversity, 40 percent of respondents associated Croatia with an exceptional natural diversity (34 percent in 2015) and 39 percent with the exploration of rich cultural heritage (35 percent in 2015), while

[24] Poslovni Puls. (2016, August 5). Evo kako na turiste utječu hrvatske marketinške aktivnosti. Retrieved from http://poslovnipuls.com/2016/08/05/evo-kako-na-turiste-utjecu-hrvatske-marketinske-aktivnosti/ [19 September 2019]

[25] Poslovni Puls. (2016, August 5). Evo kako na turiste utječu hrvatske marketinške aktivnosti. Retrieved from http://poslovnipuls.com/2016/08/05/evo-kako-na-turiste-utjecu-hrvatske-marketinske-aktivnosti/ [19 September 2019]

31 percent of respondents think of it as an untouched (protected) destination (19 percent in 2015) and 28 percent emphasize exceptional architectural diversity (23 percent in 2015).[26]

4.2.   Media campaign: "Share Istria"

Another example of a successful media campaign is: „Share Istria". In 2015, the Tourist Board of Istria implemented a project called Share Istria, bringing together a large number of travel bloggers, writers, photographers and other international authors with heavy social media presence to promote Istria worldwide. The social media influencers were required to have an online following of at least 50 000, some of them ranking way higher, exceeding a million followers.[27]

In the summer of 2015 the influencers were invited to spend a week in Istria and blog about their experience during their trip. The vacation was organized by the Tourist Board and included multiple various itineraries taking the influencer around wine cellars, diving, sailing, olive tasting, etc. Alternating bloggers throughout the summer published a total of 13 000 posts about Istria on social networks with a reach of 254 million digital users and over 3 million interactions online while traveling.[28] Since the project was a great success, it has continued to be implemented every year since.

In the summer of 2019, a chosen group of 26 participating influencers in less than 50 days reached 389 million users and interacted with more than 4 million users during the campaign.[29]

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[26] Poslovni Puls. (2016, August 5). Evo kako na turiste utječu hrvatske marketinške aktivnosti. Retrieved from http://poslovnipuls.com/2016/08/05/evo-kako-na-turiste-utjecu-hrvatske-marketinske-aktivnosti/ [19 September 2019]

[27] According to data from the Istria tourist board https://www.istra.hr/en [19 September 2019]

[28] According to data from the Istria tourist board https://www.istra.hr/en [19 September 2019]

[29] According to data from the Istria tourist board https://www.istra.hr/en [19 September 2019]

Today the official Instagram account of the project has more than 18 000 followers worldwide and more than 53 000 photos and videos are posted with the *#shareistria* hashtag.[30]

4.3. "Croatia Feeds"

The new "Croatia Feeds" marketing campaign was assessed by Google ("Think with Google") as: "very successful, i.e. as an example of good practice in the creation and implementation of promotional campaigns."[31]

The Croatian National Tourist Board implemented the project in August 2016 and it was built according to the latest trends in digital marketing. The main goal of the campaign is to inspire in an original way potential tourists to choose Croatia as a destination. The Croatian National Tourist Board cooperated with members of Google creative team "The ZOO" who cooperate with numerous world brands and agencies. The campaign was actually based on the interests of end users which was the basis for the creation of the concept. The characteristics of the concept are significantly distanced from usual online campaigns, as Croatia Feeds contains a precise combination of intriguing headlines, banners, click baits, interesting texts, and attractive photos of famous Croatian destinations and tourism products.

Google's analysis confirmed the success of the campaign in attracting the attention of users: they achieved three times more clicks compared to the other campaigns, 40% more visits to the web location of the project than the set goal and 40% increase of general searches linked to Croatia as tourist destination. The Facebook profile of the campaign had more than 20 million

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[30] According to data from www.instagram.com [22 September 2019]

[31] Croatian National Tourist Board. (2017, November 10). Croatia Feeds - the first Croatian campaign as Google's case study. Retrieved from https://htz.hr/en-GB/press/press-releases/croatia-feeds-first-croatian-campaign-googles-case-study?fbclid=IwAR176Przlt3WXVl-DY3-t7Qr9SMaTQecss3DahGiULzhxCdldbKUkjgIVU8 [19 September 2019]

impressions and almost 8 million reach. Instagram had more than 3 million impression and almost 2 million reach, while Twitter also had about 3 million impressions.[32]

4.4. "Croatia Unlocked"

The Croatian Tourist National Board and Expedia, an international travel platform, conducted a joint digital marketing campaign for Croatia's tourist trade on the U.S market. The campaign was active from April to June 2019, with the aim of increasing Croatian tourism visibility and reach, and strengthening their position on the U.S. market as a year round destination in the Mediterranean. The interest of the Tourist Board was increasing U.S. travellers' interests for Croatia as a tourist destination, while Expedia offered direct booking as an additional service.

The campaign consisted of the website visitor being offered ten photos of Croatia: islands, mountains, gastronomy, festivals, etc. The user had to 'vote' for each photo with a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down", which indicated their preferences. Based on those results they are offered a recommended travel package to a specific Croatian destination (tailored to their wants and needs) and the possibility of immediate booking through Expedia's platform.

The results of the campaign were more than positive. It improved the positioning of Croatia on the U.S. market. The online reach was more than 22 million impressions and during the campaign the flights and accommodation bookings for Croatia reached the value of 3 million USD. [33] The most popular destinations were: Dubrovnik, Split, Hvar and Zagreb, that combined

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[32] Croatian National Tourist Board. (2017, November 10). Croatia Feeds - the first Croatian campaign as Google's case study. Retrieved from https://htz.hr/en-GB/press/press-releases/croatia-feeds-first-croatian-campaign-googles-case-study?fbclid=IwAR176Przlt3WXVl-DY3-t7Qr9SMaTQecss3DahGiULzhxCdldbKUkjgIVU8 [19 September 2019]

[33] Croatian Tourism News Portal. (2019, August 27). Croatia Unlocked: HTZ u suradnji s Expediom proveo digitalnu kampanju na američkom tržištu. Retrieved from https://hrturizam.hr/croatia-unlocked-htz-u-suradnji-s-expediom-proveo-digitalnu-kampanju-na-americkom-trzistu/?fbclid=IwAR1fHYZ50gWhdjYOt1JMgCHzoFNg5MJbUZvu_zLJo3sUDuuU1wokz9_DVLU [23 September 2019]

realized more than 6 700 overnight stays. At the same time more than 2900 airplane tickets to Croatia were sold through Expedia with the main airlines being Croatia Airlines, American Airlines and British Airways.[34]

[34] Croatian Tourism News Portal. (2019, August 27). Croatia Unlocked: HTZ u suradnji s Expediom proveo digitalnu kampanju na američkom tržištu. Retrieved from https://hrturizam.hr/croatia-unlocked-htz-u-suradnji-s-expediom-proveo-digitalnu-kampanju-na-americkom-trzistu/?fbclid=IwAR1fHYZ50gWhdjYOt1JMgCHzoFNg5MJbUZvu_zLJo3sUDuuU1wokz9_DVLU [23 September 2019]
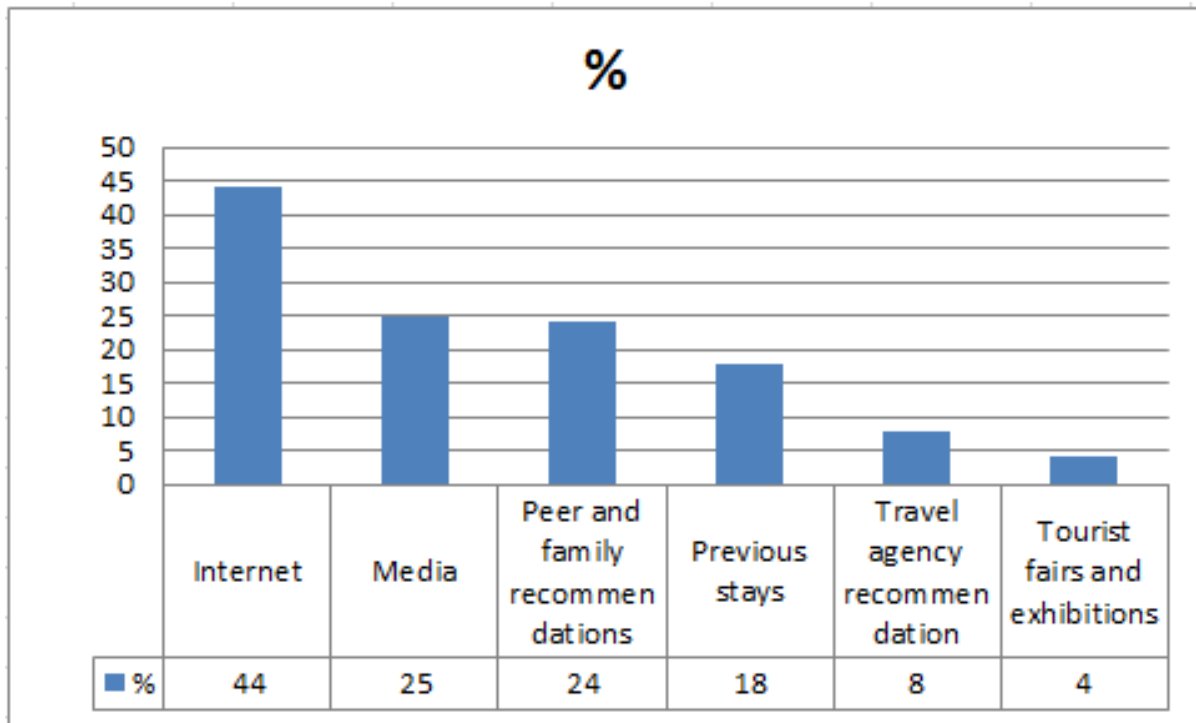
5. TOMAS Research

The Institute for Tourism Croatia has been conducting various research projects concerning trends and attitudes of tourists in Croatia, dating back to 1987. The most well-known research studies are known under the name of the TOMAS studies, which deal with the tendencies and expenditures of tourists in the country of Croatia during the summer months. The latest research published is from 2017. The one prior was published in 2014. When comparing TOMAS 2014 and TOMAS 2017 results, it is evident that the trends and structure of tourists coming to Croatia are changing.

According to the study, in the summer of 2017 there was a higher number of visitors coming to Croatia for the first time, usually young people between their 30s and 40s, more people with the two – year or higher degree and the one with higher personal income. There was a steady decrease in the amount of family vacations, but in the same time a number of shorter stays is increasing. The results also show that the tourist is spending more money in the destination on different activities. The primary motive for visiting Croatia is no more relaxation and peaceful holidays, yet new adventurous experience and gastronomy. [35]

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[35] Marušić, Z., Čorak, S., & Sever, I. (2018, February 6). Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj u 2017. godini. Retrieved from http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/file/novosti/2018/TOMAS-Ljeto-prezentacija-2017-06_02_2018-FIN.pdf [15 September 2019]

Figure 7: Sources of information of Croatian tourism, 2017[36]

|	Internet	Media	Peer and family recommendations	Previous stays	Travel agency recommendation	Tourist fairs and exhibitions
■ %	44	25	24	18	8	4

The importance of Internet and social media as a source of information in tourism industry is rising. According to the table above, in 2017 more than 44% of the tourists used social media as a tool in choosing Croatia as their travel destination and that is more than double of conventional media channels: TV, radios. We can see the increase in internet sources of information since 2014 when only 30% of the tourists used the internet; proving that in the past the tourist's previous stay had more of an impact than did social media.[37]

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[36] Marušić, Z., Čorak, S., & Sever, I. (2018, February 6). Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj u 2017. godini. Retrieved from http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/file/novosti/2018/TOMAS-Ljeto-prezentacija-2017-06_02_2018-FIN.pdf [15 September 2019]

[37] Marušić, Z., Čorak, S. (2015, February 3). Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj u 2014. godini. Retrieved from http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/Pdf/Tomas/Tomas-ljeto-2014-Prezentacija.pdf [15 September 2019]

According to those changes, the Croatian National Tourist Board introduced a series of new marketing campaigns that mainly focused on promoting/advertising vacation in Croatia on social media sites, which "brought" more impressions and website traffic and resulted in more booked trips to the country.

Figure 8: Social media sites as a source of information when choosing Croatia as a tourism destination, 2017[38]
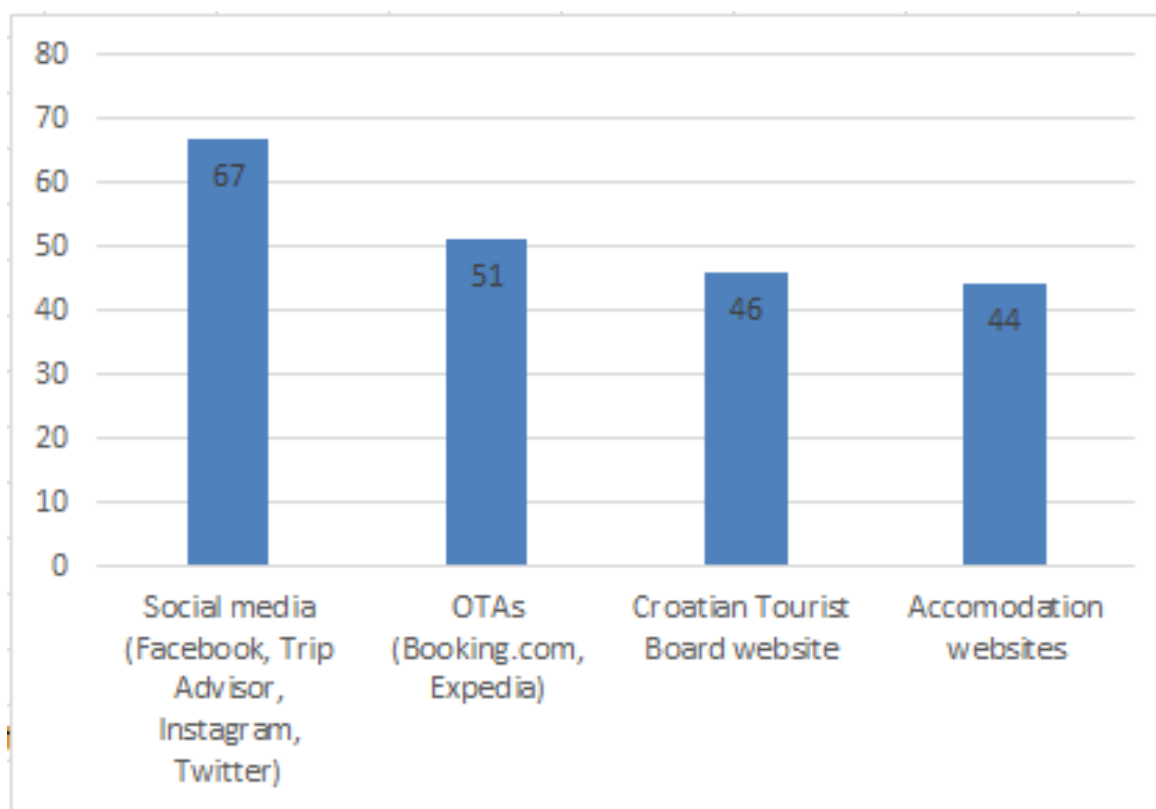

Among all the social media sites the most used ones as sources of information when choosing Croatia as a tourism destination are Facebook, TripAdvisor and Instagram.

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[38] Marušić, Z., Čorak, S., & Sever, I. (2018, February 6). Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj u 2017. godini. Retrieved from http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/file/novosti/2018/TOMAS-Ljeto-prezentacija-2017-06_02_2018-FIN.pdf [15 September 2019]

Around 67% of tourists discovered Croatia on social media sites, so when comparing the number with only 39% in 2014; we can see a substantial trend increase. People are leaning toward sites when deciding about their travel destination. At the same time there is a decline in the importance of the previous stay and friends and family recommendation. The Croatian Tourist Board Website recorded more bookings through online travel agencies, such as Expedia and Booking.com.

Figure 9: Internet activity during travel[39]
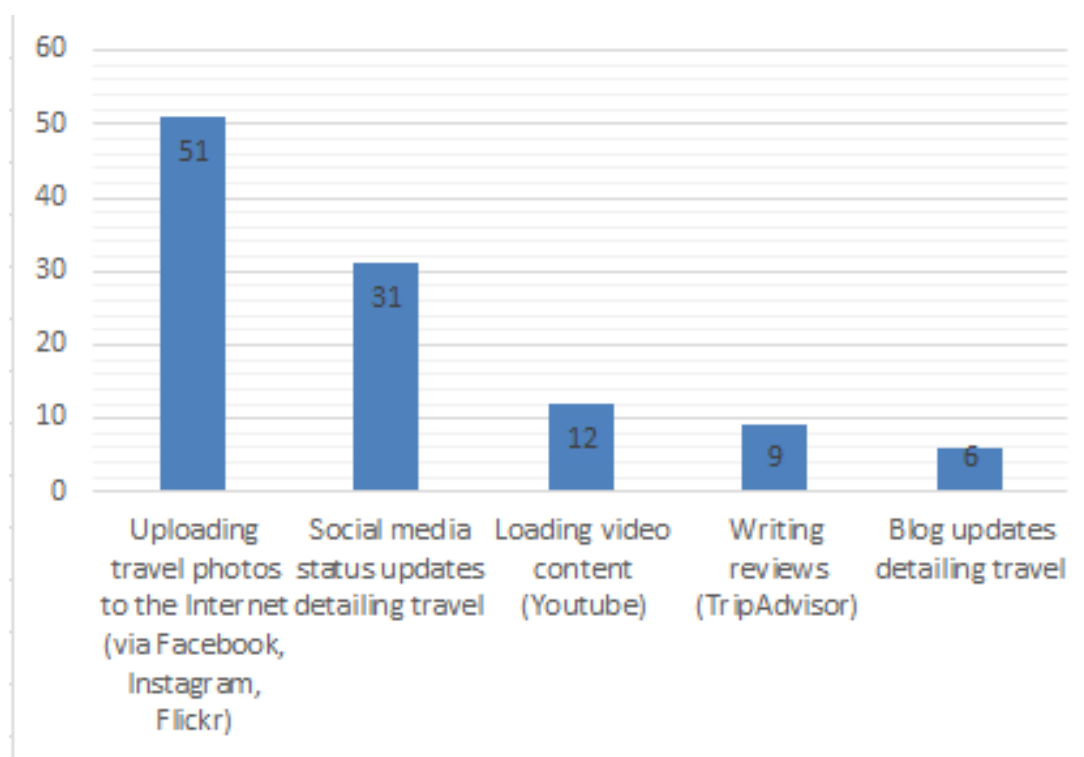
When further comparing data from the previously published TOMAS 2014 study to the latest one from 2017, it is evident how much social media activity has increased in a time span of only

[39] Marušić, Z., Čorak, S., & Sever, I. (2018, February 6). Stavovi i potrošnja turista u Hrvatskoj u 2017. godini. Retrieved from http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/file/novosti/2018/TOMAS-Ljeto-prezentacija-2017-06_02_2018-FIN.pdf [15 September 2019]

3 years. The main and largest increase of 51% is in uploading travel photos to the Internet through social media sites such as Facebook or Instagram. There was a 31% increase in status updates concerning travel, followed by a 12% and 9% increase in loading video content and writing reviews, respectively. The lowest increase of 6% is in the amount of blog updates detailing travel, which is not surprising as the popularity of blogging sites is being taken over by social media sites such as Instagram, shifting blogging to a more modern way of sharing experiences, more common to millennials.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to show the increasing influence social media has on many social and economic aspects of the society. In the first part of the paper, it was argued and proven that social media became a popular for the promotion of tourism destinations and it has a certain advantage comparing it to conventional media when choosing travel destination. After all, social media ensures rapid feedback information about anything a traveler needs. Most of the destination decision making process is affected by the user generated content online, from inspiration and planning process to post travel experience phase.

However, there is also a negative aspect of it – fake news. Fake news is created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers, to influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause confusion and can often be a profitable business for online publishers. Traditionally we got our news from trusted sources, journalists and media outlets that are required to follow strict codes of practice. However, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information and news with very little regulation or editorial standards. Many people now get news from social media sites and networks and often it can be difficult to tell whether stories are credible or not; it plays a big part in increasing the reach of these stories. The internet and social media have made it very easy for anyone to publish content on a website, blog or social media profile and potentially reach large audiences. Moreover, when digital users go online or login to a social media platform they are generally presented with news, articles and content based on their searches online; created according to their search preferences. That type of user generated content reflects their views, beliefs and therefore isolates them from different opinions and news creating a so called filter bubble.

Despite all the disadvantages, digital mobility and social media activities enable tourism industry to have appropriate insight in the world of tourists. Taking into consideration two way communications, exchange of interests, recommendations, suggestions and after all the possibility of sharing photos, videos, it is not surprising that social media is a huge stimulator for influencing destination decision making, which is evident through the example of various

Croatian social media marketing campaigns conducted in the recent years, presented in the second part of this paper. Ultimately, the findings were confirmed using TOMAS research in the final part of the paper.

Social media became an unavoidable aspect of the tourism industry. Even if one prefers conventional methods of researching travel destinations, social media makes it nearly impossible to avoid.

7. References

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