3Is Social Media the 4th 'S' – The Extended Perspectives of 'Sun, Sea and Sand'

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Abstract

The trio of 'sun, sea and sand' has been regarded as the conventional combination of attractions that pulled the tourists to a destination and made them completely satisfied. People wishing for relaxation and enjoyment intentionally visited places that were isolated from the outside world and nobody could disturb them during their vacation. Nowadays, this situation took a big turn, and most of the tourists cannot imagine that they spend a few days without an internet connection or their smartphones. In the era of smart devices, people are always connected to others and feel compelled to share their experiences even during their holidays. Social media not only permeates our lives but also has a powerful effect on our decisions and activities regarding our travels, as well. Travelling without posting on social media platforms is almost unbelievable nowadays. The aim of this paper is to reveal and analyse the situation based on a survey conducted with Hungarians.

Introduction

In the digital era, the info-communication and technological (hereinafter ICT) innovations have significantly changed the consumer behaviour of tourists. The opportunities provided by smart tools, applications and different online platforms make the travel decision-making process easier, faster and more transparent. People often choose their next destinations based on others' reviews, photos or suggestions, book their flights and the accommodations on their mobiles, and share their real-life holiday experiences via smart tools.

Thanks to the Internet and social media, more and more destinations can open their gates for potential travellers. Travellers may reach destinations, they have never heard about before, and make them known for others by sharing their experiences immediately on site. The tourists' behaviour needs have gone through a considerable change that also has made a shift in the supply side of the destinations. While in the mid of the 20th century when mass tourism started to flourish, people wished to travel destinations providing the combination of 'sun, sea and sand' (Aguiló et al., 2005). The destinations and service providers struggled to build their activities on this combination that strongly depended on seasonality and the tourist infrastructure. Therefore, many destinations left out of tourism due to the lack of 'basic' elements of the touristic operations. More and more destinations recognized the potential in tourism and started to consciously build out the basic and touristic infrastructure. Not only the 'sun and sand' destinations benefited from tourism, but also the destinations with natural or cultural attractions can enter the tourism market.

However, the attractions themselves are not satisfying for the tourists anymore, they want experiences that they can share offline (with their travel companions) and online (with their fellows on social media). Behind the travel motivation, there is often a push from friends on social media, who post their travel experiences on photos or videos. Mainly the younger generations do not want to lag and target the next tourist destinations under this pressure. Being continuously online and using our smart tools without stop pervade our holidays, as well. Using the navigation, searching for good-rated restaurants, reading QR codes for getting information on site are all the parts of holidays for better tourist experiences and satisfactions. Moreover, these experiences have to be or must be shared on social media that also needs the inevitable use of smart tools. Social media has become a fundamental attribute of holidays.

The advantages of the Internet and social media are undoubted, however, the focus has started to divert from the original purpose of holidays just, for example, stepping out from the weekdays, relaxing or discovering.

This paper aims to study the role of social media and mobile use in tourism based on a literature overview and to reveal the tourists' habits of use of smart tools, as well as social media on holidays. 386 Hungarian people were involved in empirical research.

Mobile use as a drive for tourist behaviour

Making travel decision can be regarded as a quite complicated process that requires various information sources in different phases. The information search process is very crucial from the destination choice's point of view (Bieger & Laesser, 2004; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012). The Internet and ICT tools have brought a fundamental shift in consumer behaviour of tourists already from the first step of the

decision-making process. The smartphones in people's pockets have become a perfect travel companion throughout the whole journey (Thinkwithgoogle, 2016).

According to the findings of 'think with Google' research among US people, the 60 % of destination information searches were carried out by mobile devices, while the 31 % of the leisure travellers and more than half of the business travellers booked on smartphones. Regarding the top travel activities, 44 % of the respondents searched for discounted offers, 35 and 32 % looked for destination-related information before visiting the destination and during the stay. The key findings of this research show that people desire simplicity and convenience while they use their smartphones in connection to travel.

While Thinkwithgoogle (2016) analysed usage habits from a practical perspective, Pavelka (2016) studied smartphone use during travel from the psychological side, as well. The feeling by using smartphones during travel was in the focus of the research. Based on the results of the survey conducted in the UK, 98 % of the UK respondents, the travel is more comfortable by using smartphones; 78% of them feel safer with using a smartphone.

Other research in the UK (Dickinson et al., 2014) analysed the importance of mobile applications during travel that has to be more personalized, and have to keep up with the latest consumer trends and needs. Mobile apps with numerous functions drive tourists to download them since with their usage the trip can be easier. Even though these applications are getting more popular, 82 % of US people have never paid for downloading apps, rather use free options (Thinkwithgoogle, 2016).

Figure 1
Top motivating factors for downloading travel apps

36%	To make a specific activity/task easier
32%	Recommended by others
32%	To access discounts or offers
20%	To complete a purchase
19%	Got a specific reward for downloading the app
19%	Past experience with a similar app
13%	Activity unavailable on the mobile website
18%	None of the above

Source: Thinkwithgoogle (2016)

Using mobile applications undoubtedly make the trip easier, and might make it more meaningful and informative, however, the questions arise, how tourists can live the experiences while they are stuck to the screen.

## Impact of social media on consumers of tourism

Social media has affected consumers' lives in many ways - how they perceive the world and their surrounding environments, how they see others, how they manage the daily tasks, just as purchase processes. (Månsson, 2011). Deciding on the potential target destination is never easy since it is based on a multistep model influenced by many factors (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Technological innovations (e.g. the evolution of Web 1.0 to two-way communication sites (Web 2.0 and 3.0) brought new concepts on the tourism market as well. Under the concept of Travel 2.0 consumers are empowered by information, they can easily have access to

everything (e.g. experiences, services, and everybody (other travellers and non-travellers) (Miguéns et al., 2008).

As Figure 2 shows, the decision-making process can be divided into three main phases (before, during and after), in which social media has certain roles according to Dwityas and Briandana (2017).

Figure 2
Decision-making process pervaded by social media usage
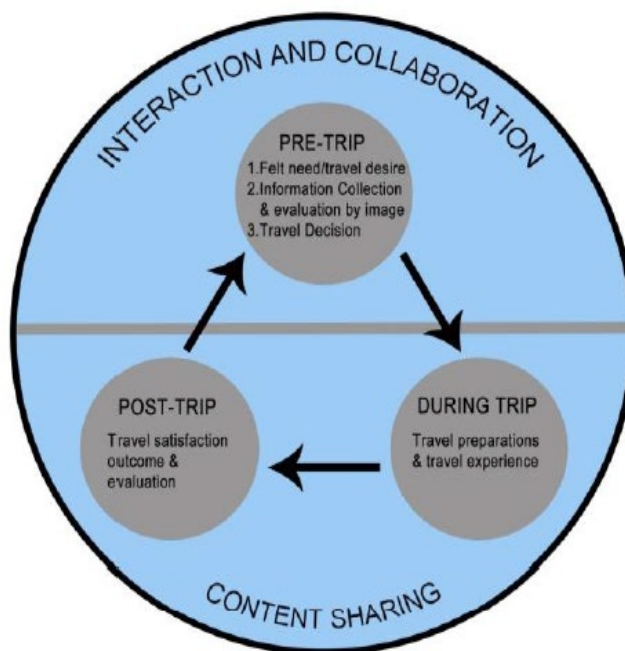
Source: Dwityas and Biranda (2017)

In the pre-trip phase, collaboration and interaction are mostly determining. The first trait of social media in this process can be traced back to the birth of motivation. In many cases, people are motivated by a photo uploaded on Facebook or Instagram, and then start to gather specific information about the destination itself, and make the final choice. Travel communities, blogs, booking or comparative websites all can help the decision-making. Consumers interact with each other, share their past experiences, make ratings. In the 'during trip' phase, content sharing gets more importance. Li's academic studies have focused on the analysis of the motivations lagging photo-taking and sharing behaviours during travel (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Li, 2020; Sotiriadis, 2017; Pan et al., 2014;). Based on their findings, the recognition and status, the enjoyment, the disclosure, and the information-giving, external expectations drive people to post and share photos and videos about their trips. Furthermore, another study pointed out the significance of sharing and posting in the post-trip evaluation. According to Kim and Fesenmaier (2017), those travellers who share their experiences on social media give more positive post-trip evaluations than who do not share.

Methodology

This study draws on quantitative data from an online survey conducted with 386 Hungarian respondents under omnibus research in autumn 2019. Regarding the demographics of the survey sample as shown in Table 1 , 71,2 % of the respondents were female, 28,8 % was male. Most of them (69,9%) belong to the youngest age

group (18-25). 61,7 % of respondents travel once or two times a year, 22,5 % travel three or four times.

Table 1
Demographic profile of the sample

	n	%			n	%	
Age group				**Gender**			
18-25 years	270	69,9	%	female	275	71,2	%
26-35 years	32	8,3	%	male	111	28,8	%
36-45 years	45	11,7	%				
46-55 years	21	5,4	%	**Education**			
55-65 years	13	3,4	%	Primary school	11	2,8	%
> 65 years	5	1,3	%	Secondary school	302	78,2	%
				College/ university	70	18,1	%
Occupation				Postgraduate/ PhD	3	0,8	%
Student	240	62,2	%				
Entrepreneur	9	2,3	%	**Frequency of travel**			
Public sector employee	42	10,9	%	not every year	8	2,1	%
Private sector employee	88	22,8	%	1-2 times a year	238	61,7	%
Retired	1	0,3	%	3-4 times a year	87	22,5	%
Other	5	1,3	%	> 4 times a year	53	13,7	%

Source: Authors' edition

The research aimed to reveal the consumer behaviour of the Hungarian respondents regarding the smartphone and social media usage during travel.

It is vital to note the limitations of the survey: the questions were not asked by phase by the phase of the travel decision-making process, it rather concentrated on the 'during the trip' phase. Furthermore, the sample is not representative of the Hungarian population, either.

The following research questions were drafted:

- RQ1: How much does smartphone usage pervade the holidays of the respondents?
- RQ2: How important is experience sharing (e.g. photos) on social media for the Hungarian travellers?

To get a reply to the research questions above, descriptive and simple statistical relationship analyses were done. The statements had to be evaluated by the respondents on 5-point Likert scales.
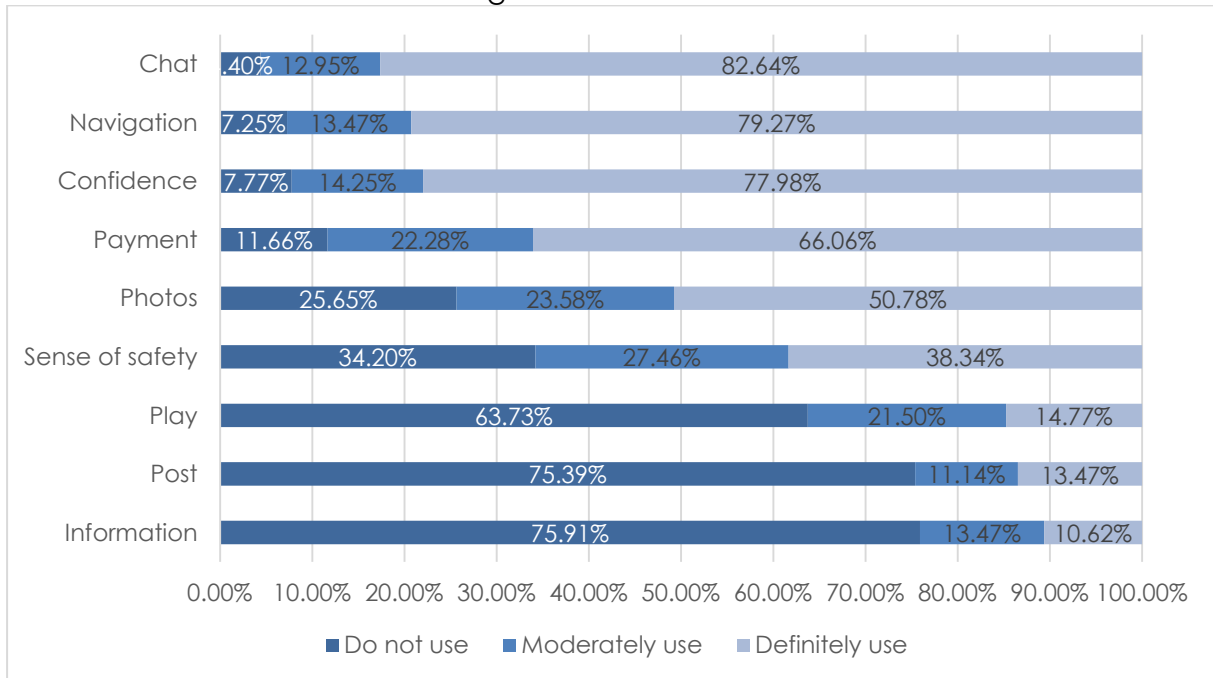
Results

Regarding the usage of smart devices, smartphone usage is the most determining, 98 % of the respondents use it daily. Using other smart tools like tablet or activity tracker is not so popular, only 5-15 % of them use these tools daily.

Smart devices provide several opportunities that make holidays more comfortable and easier for tourists (See Figure 3). 82,64 % of the Hungarian respondents use smart devices for contacting others. Navigation function can be regarded as important as chatting since approximately 79 % takes advantage of it. The results show that having smartphones or other smart tools makes people more confident, even though they do not bring it in parallel to the sense of safety and security. Surprisingly,

the majority of the respondents (75%) do not use smart devices for gathering information during travel.

Figure 3
Smart device functions used during travel

Chat: .40% 12.95% 82.64%
Navigation: 7.25% 13.47% 79.27%
Confidence: 7.77% 14.25% 77.98%
Payment: 11.66% 22.28% 66.06%
Photos: 25.65% 23.58% 50.78%
Sense of safety: 34.20% 27.46% 38.34%
Play: 63.73% 21.50% 14.77%
Post: 75.39% 11.14% 13.47%
Information: 75.91% 13.47% 10.62%

■ Do not use ■ Moderately use ■ Definitely use

Source: The Authors' edition

According to the replies, the Hungarians try to mitigate the usage of smart tools during the holiday, since 78 % said that they used less them compared to everyday habits. The analysed age groups did not show any differences, each group struggles to use less. However, only half of the respondents would be willing to eliminate its use during holidays.

As it was described in the literature overview, social media is the organic part of our lives. The survey results also underpin this statement, hence the almost 90 % of the respondents use Facebook daily, 64 % of them use Instagram. Concerning the social media presence during the holiday, 48 % of the Hungarians never post from holidays, 19 % does every day (See Figure 4).

Figure 4
Social media presence during the holiday

- ■ more times a day — 5%
- ■ once a day — 14%
- ■ weekly — 6%
- ■ occasionally — 48%
- ■ never — 27%
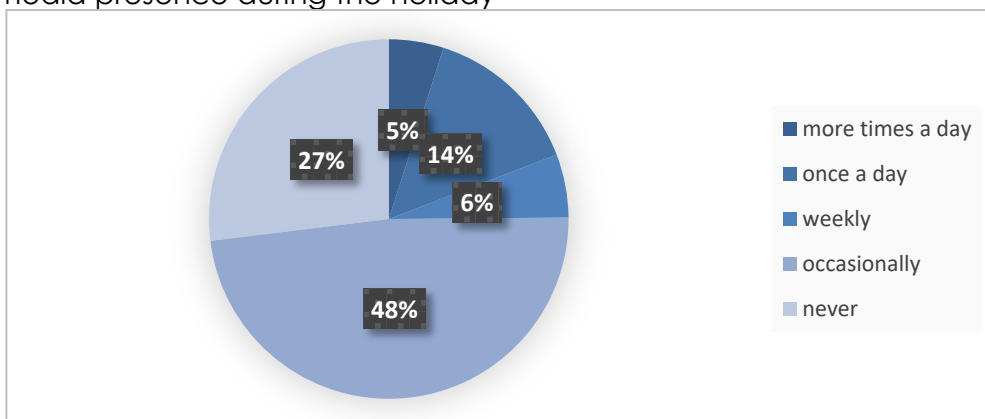
Source: Authors' work

The younger people show more active social media presence than the older respondents. The respondents aged 18-25 post more frequently, hence sharing experiences more time a day characterizes them mostly. Respondents above 55 years do not post at all during their holiday. Pearson's Chi-square test also proved the statistically significant relationship between the variables on the 5 % significance level (p=0,00<0,05).

According to the Pearson Chi-square test, there is a significant relationship bet between age groups.

While only the 50 % of the respondent could mitigate or eliminate the smartphones use during the holiday, a higher proportion of them (67 %) would be willing the use less social media on those days when they are on trip.

Discussion

The present study confirms the current trend that smart devices undoubtedly became the organic parts of our lives. The survey results also justify the fact that people's holiday and related habits have considerably changed due to technological innovations and devices. During the holiday, smart devices can provide many advantages that make the holiday more comfortable. Navigation and chat functions are the most popular among the respondents, but they also prefer to take photos or play with smart devices.

Some form of social media platforms are known by all respondents, but Facebook is the most beloved among them. Posting and sharing experiences on social media are rather preferred by the youngest tourists (18-25 years), the quarter of them post from holiday daily.

The results suggest that people want to get rid of using smartphones/devices so much during holiday, however, only a minority of them would be willing to eliminate its usage during travel.

One of the limitations of the research is that the sample is non-representative for the Hungarian population. Furthermore, the survey questions focused only the 'during-trip' phase, while the before and after phases would be interesting from the perspective of social media usage.

Conclusion

Technological innovations, the appearance of smart devices fundamentally changed the tourism industry, including the consumer behaviour of tourists. In our accelerated world, potential tourists are empowered by more information than ever, they can reach any destinations they want, and they can do all this via a smartphone or a smartwatch. They go nowhere without their smart 'buddies', not even on holiday. Unfortunately, the holiday seems to lose its traditional value meaning relaxing or discovering with friends or families, instead, people travel to a destination just to show an image on social media, and keep up with others.

Not only researches confirmed that the consumer behaviour of the people changed due to the digitalization, but also consumers often admit that the disadvantaged and the excessive use of smart devices, especially during the holiday. The constant online mode can alter the quality of life and human relationships, too. In the tourism industry, the answer given to the above-mentioned trend is a new trend in the form of 'digital detox'. The service providers recognized that organizing a camp or tour focusing on digital detox could be a new market niche. As the survey results showed people involved in the survey also drew up the

hidden need by saying that they try to mitigate the usage of smart devices and social media platforms.

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