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**“Applicable Knowledge for a Sustainable Future”**

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## The Role and Importance of Information Technology in the Organization of Tourist Travel: Case Study of Republic of Croatia

Milena Podovac<sup>44</sup>, Marko Čičin-Šain<sup>45</sup>, Vedran Milojica<sup>46</sup>

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Tourism represents one of the few industries, the development of which is almost impossible without monitoring and adapting modern technological achievements. Modern information technology (IT) has greatly transformed the process of making decisions about the travel of tourists, as well as the way of collecting information and booking services in the destination.

**Aim:** The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on the importance of information technology in shaping the behavior of modern tourists with a special emphasis on the Republic of Croatia.

**Method:** In order to determine the level of representation of IT in the organization of the travel of tourists coming to the Republic of Croatia, the authors analyzed selected research results, which were presented in the study Attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia TOMAS 2019.

**Findings:** The results of this research indicated the dominant representation of the Internet as a source information about the destination as well as online booking when reserving accommodation services in the Republic of Croatia. In addition to the analysis and interpretation of secondary data sources, the authors defined appropriate guidelines with the aim of pointing out the necessity of implementing IT in all segments of the tourist offer so that tourists coming to the Republic of Croatia can have a simpler organization of travel and stay, which would result in a higher degree of tourist satisfaction.

**Key Words** : IT, travel, tourists, travel behavior, Republic of Croatia.

**Jel Codes** : L83

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Internet represents the most significant tool of communication in the contemporary development of human society. It can be stated with utmost certainty that today there is no activity which can be developed adequately without the application of the Internet and other technological innovations. Internet use is widely developed in the society and economy, and consequently in tourism, which enables service providers to present and promote their offer with a goal of achieving greater market participation (Grahovac et al., 2017). The use of Information Technology has become the main strategic tool for achieving success and competitiveness of tourist destinations on the tourist market. Through its application tourist destinations are able to promote and offer their tourist products and services on the virtual tourist market to a wide range of people, which results in a much easier identification and promotion, and competitiveness of a destination (Bayram, 2020). The strength of the internet manifests in the fact that the potential tourist's first experience with a particular destination is precisely achieved through browsing the photos and reading the texts that promote its offer, as well as the reviews of other tourists which is of significant use for them during their decision-making process when choosing a holiday destination. Due to this, tourism and hospitality enterprises need to effectively use online advertising, social networks, etc. to make tourist products and services accessible to tourists in an easier way (Entre Technology Services, n.d.). It is also mandatory to observe what are the actual tourist's attitudes towards using information

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technology, respectively their preferences in using it, i.e. how high is the interest for using the internet when searching for information about a particular destination, and for those who tend to use it, which exactly internet sources of information do they prefer using the most, so additional focus would be made on additional adaptations aimed towards satisfying tourist's needs.

Croatia is a world-renowned tourist destination which has been investing significantly in its tourism development and is focused on providing high quality services. The most recent findings of TOMAS Croatia 2019 attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia (Institute for Tourism Zagreb, 93) indicate that tourists have evaluated Croatian tourist product with relatively high marks when it comes to satisfaction (Alkier et al., 2021). In order to be able to continue registering positive results in the upcoming period, Croatia needs to focus on further investments in maintaining the current level, and at the same time improving the quality and diversity of a tourist product. Particular accent needs to be placed on the implementation on the implementation of the newest Information Technology, considering its advantages that contribute in achieving Croatia's competitiveness on the tourist market.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The development of modern information technology dictates trends in the development of tourism for the last 50 years (Mamaghani, 2009). Modern information technology accelerates the process of connecting tourist supply and tourist demand on the market, which enables a completely new dimension to the distribution of package arrangements and services of tourist companies that, by applying new innovative and useful tools, increase their presence on the global tourist market and achieve more efficient placement of their services (Ivanović et al., 2016). From the development of computerized reservation systems in the 1960s through global distribution systems in the 1980s to the Internet in the early 1990s, the travel industry has constantly adapted to the emergence of new technological innovations, which at the same time represented opportunities but also threats to its development (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Inversini et al., 2015; Xiang et al., 2015). Unlike other activities, the tourism industry easily accepts the emergence of new technological innovations and also adapts to the increasingly demanding needs of tourists, for whom modern technology enables the availability of a large volume of information (Baldigara & Penić, 2020). Modern information technology enables greater interactivity between tourism companies and consumers (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005). Certain authors emphasize tourism as an activity, which is a pioneer in accepting and adapting to the intensive development of information technology (Ma et al., 2003; Garín-Muñoz & Pérez-Amaral, 2011; Labanauskaitė et al., 2020). The intensive development of modern information technology contributes to the transformation of the travel industry, especially to the reshaping of tourist behavior during the travel decision-making process, as well as the sharing of personal experiences of staying in a certain destination digitally. On the other hand, independent travel organization is made possible thanks to the online presentation of the offer of tourist and hospitality companies, which saves tourists time and money that they would otherwise invest in the case of hiring an intermediary.

Technological innovations have played an important role in providing support to tourists during the collection of information needed for travel planning, communication with tourism service providers, as well as during their consumption (Gretzel et al., 2006). Tourists prefer the use of social media when planning their trips, as a result of which the carriers of tourist offer are faced with the necessity to improve the volume and quality of data about their offer through this type of modern communication (Cheunkamon et al., 2020). Social networks provide tourists with a new generation of means of personal expression and communication, which caused crucial changes in the way of searching, evaluating, producing, buying, and consuming tourist services (Constantoglou & Trihas, 2020). On the other hand, tourists use information, which are available through social networks in all stages of the journey - before the journey, during the journey and after the journey, with social networks having the greatest influence in

the pre-journey phase (Amaro et al., 2016; Pabel&Prideaux, 2016) where there is a lower risk that the tourist will choose a destination whose offer is not suitable according to his needs and preferences.

Available online reviews of the offer and services in the destination as well as the comments and ratings of other tourists help tourists in making a decision and in the travel planning process (Rathore, 2020). The influence of social networks on the behavior of tourists in different stages of the journey can be explained as follows (Dwityas&Briandana, 2017; Zavodna & Zavodny Pospisil, 2018):

- The phase before the journey, in which the tourist collects information about the destination and its offer, as well as activities, which can complement the free time during the stay in the destination. In addition, tourists in this phase collect information about the easiest way to reach the destination, but also buy services, i.e., reserve and pay for transportation and accommodation services;
- The travel phase, that is, the phase in which tourists experience all tourist experiences, which include the consumption of services (transportation, accommodation, food, attractions, etc.). In this phase too, information about the services and attractions of the destination is necessary during the trip and stay;
- The post-travel phase is the phase in which the tourist has returned from his journey and in which he evaluates his experiences and degree of satisfaction with the entire stay in the destination, the quality of services and the sources of information he used when making the decision about the journey. This evaluation will influence the next tourist experience.

Analyzing the role of social networks in assessing the attractiveness of a destination and its safety, Tuclea et al. (2020) concluded that this communication channel has a significant impact on the decision to choose a destination, as well as that it is a useful tool when planning a journey. Fotis et al. (2012) investigated the impact of social networks in different stages of travel, where they pointed out that 45% of respondents in the pre-journey phase used social networks to get an idea of which destination to travel to, while 50% of respondents used this form of communication to stay in contact with friends, but in a much smaller number of cases to get information about the trip. The authors also stated that 78% of respondents used social networks after their trip to share their experiences or photos with their friends or other tourists. Analyzing the influence of social networks on travel planning when it comes to individual generations, Werenowska and Rzepka (2020) pointed out that generation Z tourists use TripAdvisor and Facebook to find information about the destination, while generation Y tourists prefer YouTube and Instagram as media, which enable quick access to content that is appropriate for them. The authors also pointed out that information obtained through social networks was crucial for choosing a destination, while visual content in the form of photos is popular among Millennials. In a study by Techajirakul and Prasongsukarn (2019), it was determined that tourists who belong to the Millennial generation depend on social networks when it comes to travel organization as well as motivation for travel and gathering information about the destination's offer. Analyzing the influence of social networks on the choice of a destination by the student population, Anđelić and Grmuša (2017) concluded that as many as 40% of students aged 21-29 use social networks as a means of information and choice of destination; they most often use TripAdvisor (36.7 %), Instagram (21.1%) and YouTube (20%). By analyzing the influence of Instagram on travel planning and destination selection, Tešin et al. (2022) pointed out that as many as 53% of respondents in their study very often look at posts on Instagram and also discover new destinations through this social network. The authors also stated that by looking at photos of destinations on Instagram, respondents got the desire to visit the destination or developed an interest in it. Social networks have a great influence on the formation of the behavior of tourists during the decision-making about the journey, through the journey itself to the return to the place of residence, enabling them not only to be informed about the offer of a certain destination, but also to share with other network members their impressions, attitudes and criticisms.

Allowing tourists to share information and content through social networks facilitates the definition and implementation of promotional activities by the carriers of tourist offers, because in this way they can target a certain segment of tourist demand. In addition to social networks, the Internet represents an extremely influential channel for the transmission of information to tourists, but also an important distribution and promotion channel for providers of tourist services.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF ICT IN THE TRAVEL ORGANIZATION OF CROATIAN TOURISTS

#### 3.1. Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, the authors used the selected results of the research TOMAS Croatia 2019 attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia, which was conducted and published by the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb, Republic of Croatia in 2019. For the purposes of this research, a structured questionnaire was used, which was adapted for the purposes of data collection called CAPI (Computer aided personal interview), respectively, a personal interview was conducted with the help of the computer/tablet. The questionnaire was available for the respondents in Croatian and other world languages.

#### 3.2. Results

Following the authors will present the selected results of TOMAS 2019 research. Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents will also be presented along with the research results that relate to the use of information technology.

*Table 1: Tourist's age*

Age	Total	Adriatic Croatia	Continental Croatia
Up to 25	7,2	7,1	9,3
26-35	23,6	23,6	23,1
36-45	30,9	31,1	27,1
46-55	20,0	20,1	19,1
56+	18,3	18,1	21,3

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 30)

According to the data from the previous table, on the level of the Republic of Croatia, the majority of the respondents belong to the age group 36-45 (30,9%), followed by the age groups 26-35 (23,6%), 46-55 (20,0%), and 56 and more (18,3%), The least respondents belonged to the age group up to 25 years of age (7,2%).

*Table 2: Level of education*

Level of education	Adriatic Croatia	Continental Croatia
High school or lower	25,0	17,4
College	32,8	34,5
Faculty or more	42,2	48,1

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 30)

Research results indicate that total of 43% of tourists who visited Croatia have a faculty degree, which implicates that most of them are highly educated. In continental Croatia a total of 48,1% of the respondents have a faculty degree, while in Adriatic Croatia the percentage is a bit lower (42,2%). The following are the respondents with a college degree (34,5% in continental Croatia, and 32,8% in Adriatic Croatia). When observing the respondents with a high school diploma, 25,0% of them were registered in Adriatic Croatia, and 17,4% in Continental Croatia.



**Table 3: Monthly income in Euro**

Monthly income in Euro	Adriatic Croatia	Continental Croatia
Up to 500,00	0,7	1,2
501,00-1,000	3,4	7,7
1,001-1,500	6,6	12,6
1,501-2,000	11,1	13,6
2,001-2,500	14,3	13,1
2,501-3,000	14,7	13,1
3,001-3,500	13,7	8,8
3,501-4,000	13,9	9,0
4,001-5,000	9,8	8,6
5,001 and more	11,8	12,2

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 31)

The data from the previous table indicate clearly that the most of the respondents achieve a high monthly income. In Adriatic Croatia high 29% have a monthly income varying from 2,000-3,000 EURO, while 27,6% achieve an income ranging 3,000-4,000 EURO. 21,6% of the respondents achieve 4,000-5,000 EURO and more. The results for continental Croatia indicate that 26,2% of the respondents achieve a monthly income ranging 2,000-3,000%, 17,8% achieve income ranging 3,000-4,000 EURO, and 20,8% achieve 4,000-5,000 EURO and higher.

**Table 4: Sources of information (%)**

Sources of information	Adriatic Croatia	Continental Croatia
<b>Internet</b>	<b>55,5</b>	<b>47,6</b>
Recommendations of friends and family	25,4	26,7
Prior stay	22,3	19,9
Recommendations of a tourist agency or a club	9,6	23,3
Brochures, ads, posters	5,2	4,8
Radio, television, film or video	5,2	3,2
Tourist fairs, exhibitions	4,8	5,0
Articles in newspapers or journals	3,4	1,7

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 33); Note: possibility of multiple answers

The previous table indicates what are the exact sources of information that were used the most by the respondents who visited Croatia. In this particular case it is the internet that has been leading significantly (55,5% in Adriatic Croatia, and 47,6% in Continental Croatia). A positive word of mouth, respectively recommendations of friends and family, which was in the past the form of the strongest and the most efficient marketing before the Internet boom, registered the strongest result (25,4% in Adriatic Croatia, and 26,7% in Continental Croatia). Other sources of information registered lower results.

**Table 5: Internet as a source of information trend 1997-2019 (%)**

Year	%
1997	1,5
2001	8,8
2004	23,1
2007	29,9
2010	26,8
2014	29,5
2017	44,1
2019	56,3

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 50)

The data in the previous table indicates a significant growth of the internet as a source of obtaining information about the tourist offer. The highest result was achieved in 2019 when 56,3% of the respondents used internet as primary source for obtaining information. This clearly indicates that the demand is intensively more and more relying on online information as well as the promotion (Institute for Tourism Zagreb, 2019, 50).

**Table 6: Internet as a source of information (%)**

Internet as a source of information	Total	Adriatic Croatia	Continental Croatia
Online tourist agencies: Booking.com, Expedia, Holidaycheck.de, etc.	61,1	61,8	47,7
Social media (Facebook, TripAdvisor, Instagram, Twitter...)	48,1	48,4	40,8
Websites of the accommodation facilities	41,7	41,9	38,3
Websites of Croatian tourist boards or offices (National, local)	30,6	29,5	52,0

Source: Institute for Tourism Zagreb (2019, 35)

Previous table presents the results for the respondents who used Internet as source of information. When observing the results for Croatia in total, 61,1% of the respondents used online tourist agencies like Booking.com, Expedia, Holidaycheck.de, etc. for obtaining information about the accommodation offer, followed by social media (48,1%), websites of the accommodation facilities (41,7%), and websites of Croatian tourist boards or offices (national, local) (30,6%). In Adriatic Croatia a total of 61,8% respondents used online tourist agencies, after which follows social media (48,4%), websites of the accommodation facilities (41,9%), while the websites of Croatian tourist boards or offices (national, local) were used the least (29,5%). The results for continental Croatia show a slightly different situation; a 52% of the respondents prefer to use websites of Croatian tourist boards, followed by online tourist agencies (47,7%), social media (40,8%) while the websites of the accommodation facilities were used the least (38,3%).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes the role and significance of modern information technology in planning and organizing tourist journeys with a special focus on the Republic of Croatia. By analyzing theoretical findings, the authors came to the conclusion that the development of modern tourism is unthinkable without the use of the Internet and other electronic means of communication. Special focus was placed on the analysis of the results of previous research on the use of modern information technology by tourists when making travel decisions and planning the journey itself. In the conditions of the digital environment, the information that tourists can collect via the Internet and other networks is very often the primary source of information that they rely on when making travel decisions. Also, today tourists predominantly use the advantages of the Internet to book and pay for services that they will be using in the destinations where they will be staying. The transformation, which occurred thanks to the development of the Internet, made it necessary for service providers to adapt to the demands of tourists through the online presentation of their offer and the provision of a wider range of information for tourists via the Internet, social networks, and other means of communication. In this paper, the results of the Attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia TOMAS 2019 study were analyzed with the aim of examining the extent to which tourists who come to the Republic of Croatia use the Internet and other means of digital communication in planning their trips.

According to the results of the aforementioned research, the Internet is the main source of information used by tourists when collecting information about the tourist offer of the Republic of Croatia, and the number of tourists who rely on this source of information is increasing year

by year. It is very important for providers of tourist services to know the primary information that tourists use when making decisions about visiting destinations in the Republic of Croatia in order to focus on improving the quality and volume of information that they provide in this way. The results of the research showed that tourists who come to the Republic of Croatia are primarily guided by information they get through online tourist agencies like Booking.com, Expedia, Holidaycheck, then social networks and websites of hotels and websites of Croatian tourist boards or offices. Carriers of the tourist offer of destinations in the Republic of Croatia can use the conclusions of this research with the aim of creating an attractive online presentation of their offer, which they can market through these media with the aim of attracting a larger number of tourists. In order to take and maintain a competitive position on the market, it is necessary for the carriers of the tourist offer to follow the development of technological innovations and their implementation in their businesses in order to also improve the quality of services and facilitate the process of communication with potential tourists.

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