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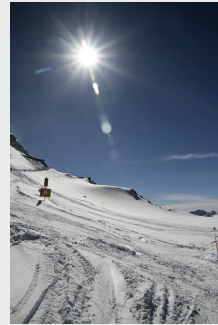**Higher Education in Function of Sustainable Development of Tourism in Serbia and Western Balkans**

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REPRESENTATION OF E-COMMUNICATION IN OFFER OF ZLATIBOR AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Invited paper

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Abstract: *World tourism is unthinkable without the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT). This applies to tourism of Zlatibor, which is the main factor of the tourism in Western Serbia. The subject of this paper is a discussion of the form of ICT in the tourism industry, with particular emphasis on e-communication in the tourist supply of Zlatibor. The deficiencies in the application of ICT will be recognized and relevant solutions will be proposed by which the strategic goal will be achieved - increasing efficiency of all entities of the tourism industry of Zlatibor, improving the quality of tourism services and increased satisfaction of users of these services.*

Keywords: ICT, tourism, e-communication, Zlatibor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Increasing the quality of life of every tourist is in direct correlation with the level of achieved quality of tourism products. Life is becoming faster. Changes happen every day. Modern tourists wants to be informed as soon as possible about the tourist supply, to book travel arrangement promptly, to communicate constantly with friends and family while on vacation, and to exchange their experiences through social networks. All this succeeds only thanks to modern ICT.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of information and communication technologies in the development of tourism, as well as to analyze the presence of e-communication in the offer of Zlatibor as a tourist destination, and to propose measures for adequate advancement of e-business of Zlatibor tourism industry.

2. THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

Successful application of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in the global tourism market, in recent years, has led to significant improvements in the business operations of all relevant entities. ICT, as a wide range of technologies, is present in all segments of the tourism industry: in traffic (airline, shipping company, car rental agencies and other providers of transport), in the system of business of travel

agencies, hotel companies, etc. ICT has brought new tools in business and new distribution channels. Thanks to the precipitous development of the Internet and the overall ICT, information has become available, shared and spread among a large group of potential users of services. The combination of existing media and Internet services has improved user and service providers interactivity. Business efficiency, the quality of tourism services and consumer satisfaction are constantly increasing. Additional results are the contribution to globalization and popularization of tourist movements (Pavlović, D., 2008). Now we have a new global tourism market with great competition.

Modern research points out that one trip can be defined through 5 levels, and each level can be related to the use of the Internet:

1. Dreaming

At this stage the first ideas about travel occur. Research suggests that as many as 55% of tourists are seeking online information after they see some advertisements on the Internet.

2. Planning the trip

After the idea of travelling, people start planning. According to the data, 85% of people consider Internet a major source of useful information for planning trips.

3. Booking

One third of the tourists say the Internet played a key role in booking the trip.

4. Experience

Experiences from the trip are often shared on the Internet.

5. Sharing

After the trip a large number of people (52%) use the Internet as a means by which they share photos and impressions from their vacation with their friends (Živković, R., 2013).

We conclude that for the birth of ideas about travel, planning and sharing impressions of the trip, Internet is the main channel of information for the most of interested groups.

Serbian tourist market lags behind the world trends, but it is certainly noticeable that there is the improvement of the tourism industry and its increased share in the overall economy of Serbia. Many authors (Buhalis, D., 1998) indicate that although the use of modern information and communication technologies can improve business tourist company or hotel company, we should keep in mind that it may not be the answer to all problems. It is necessary to renew the operational and strategic management in order to achieve long-term profits. Since tourism is an industry that is dependent on other industries (shipping industry, food industry, etc.) the development of tourism in Serbia also has that limiting factor. When considering the use of ICT in the Serbian tourist market, and we estimate the size of the target group of people, we have to take into account the information literacy of users of tourist services. Most of the users of tourist services are still originating in Serbia. In the last few years, data on ICT activities of the citizens are encouraging.

Republican Bureau of Statistics in survey from 2015. came to some important conclusions on the interest of the population about information technologies. Collected data say that 64.4% of households own a computer. Furthermore, it was shown that 63.8% of households have an Internet connection where Internet is prevalent in urban areas (70.1%) compared to rural (53.2%). Compared with previous statistics it is clear that there

is a constant growth in the number of households that have a computer and Internet access. This research has shown that even 2.95 million people every day or almost every day use the Internet. It is interesting that even 75.6% of Internet users are on social networks, and 67.7% use the Internet to search for information about goods and services. (http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/repository/documents/00/01/85/78/SAOP_IKT__2015 s.pdf)

The research of Internet World Stats, international site for the presentation of statistical data on the use of the Internet, Internet marketing and other information related to this global network, from June 2016. estimates that Serbia has 4,758,861 Internet users accounting for 66.6% of the total population, Facebook users 3,400,000 which is 47.6% of the total population. Compared with the percentage that applies to Europe as a whole 73.5%, we can say that we are closer to the European level. (http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.html)

We conclude that users are no longer passive consumers but already very actively involve in a way that suits them and which are imposed by wider community. The data, which were previously stated, demonstrate that such behavior has a higher percentage of users of tourist services. The availability of information anytime, anywhere, speed, flexibility and breadth of choice affect users give up on traditional types of media and are turning to the Internet.

This positive energy of users of tourist services is huge potential for the tourist market which should be exploited, nurtured and constantly upgraded. This requires certain knowledge and skills in the field of ICT which entities in the tourism industry must master and they have to improve constantly.

3. E- COMMUNICATION

Shanker (Shanker, D., 2008) believes that there are certain key factors that must be met in order to implement ICT in tourism adequately.

Figure 1: Conditions for implementing ICT in tourism (Shanker)

An organization that meets these requirements and provides effective communication and information sharing within the organization is ready to enter the fight for tourists in the global tourist market by application of modern ICT tools and communication channels

Practice shows that consumers go through five stages during the process of deciding on a specific purchase: knowledge of the needs, the search for relevant information, evaluation and comparison of alternatives, decision about purchase and behavior after purchase. In each of these five stages, tourist companies can operate using different channels of electronic communications (e-communications).

Figure2: *Electronic communication*

Electronic communication (CMC, computer mediated communications) doesn't just mean new tools for communication; it means new ways to communicate. Today organization interacts with its various constituents differently - employees, board members, customers, partners and others - depending upon the nature of the message, the goals you are trying to achieve and the strengths (and weaknesses) of the available media - telephones, voice mail, fax machines, print, etc. Electronic communications adds a powerful new channel that not only will change how you use this mix of options, but it will create entirely new ways to interact. For example:

• Electronic communications lets you combine numerous media - text, graphics sound, video, etc. - into a single message. That can result in far more meaningful communications tailored to the nature of your particular audience. In contrast to broadcasting, narrowcasting reflects the ability to develop numerous communications for subsets of your market or constituencies.

• Electronic communications is interactive. It engages audiences in active, two-way communications. That requires a new way of thinking about advertising copy and the handling of public relations. The pay-off, however, is a self-selected audience, engaged and actively participating in the communications process.

• Two-way communication is nothing new. But electronic communications creates a new form of many-to-many communications that lets geographically distributed groups

communicate interactively and simultaneously through text, sound and video. You can hold inexpensive video conferences or press conferences from your desk, or conference with people at several desks located across the world. One of the burgeoning phenomena of the Internet is businesses and organizations sponsoring, supporting and moderating discussion groups about issues, products, strategies - anything of interest to the organization and its constituents. Sponsorships are also solicited for popular resources, such as indexes and other Internet search tools, and these provide a further communications and marketing opportunity.

• Many organizations are using electronic communications facilities, such as the World Wide Web, as internal communications tools to enhance team work. Many individuals at different locations can work on the same documents, hold meetings and integrate research findings.

• Electronic communications removes the power of communications *gatekeepers* to both positive and negative effects. Most organizations are used to controlling the messages that go out to its constituents through managers, spokespeople and others. But with the Internet, constituents begin to talk among themselves, requiring new approaches and a new emphasis on listening and reacting, not just talking.

• With the Internet you have the ability to transmit and receive large amounts of information quickly to and from individuals and workgroups around the world. This changes the way activists, for example, can galvanize communities, inform legislators and change public opinion. It changes the sources and depth of your constituents' knowledge levels. It also lets those constituents reach you with new kinds of communications they may never have attempted before.

And these are only some of the changes we are seeing now, mostly positive.

However, research and practice suggest caution when using certain types of electronic communications in certain segments of the tourist offer:

1. E-mail - problem with this type of communication is that e-mail from unknown senders often ends up in "junk" folder and thus, potential users do not become familiar with interesting offers. In addition, it is very important that the cause for sending e-mails is justified. Mail boxes are usually overloaded with messages of different types, so repeating the same offer may have the opposite effect. It is therefore very important to update mailing lists frequently and be creative in delivering new offerings.

2. Blog - according to research of Mack.R. (Mack.R., 2008) and his associates, blog presents to customers less reliable source of information. One of the reasons could be the motivation of blog authors, it is assumed that the on-line comments, which are usually anonymous are objective because the authors do not obtain in this way any benefits while the authors of blogs can be paid to report in a positive way. Also available number of blogs on the same topic is often large making it difficult to find relevant information.

3. Web site - unless they meet certain criteria imposed by modern trends, retention of users can be extremely small. Avramovic (Avramović, M., 2007) gives a few rules for the web site as a presentation of the tourist enterprises:

a. Clarity

Internet presentations should be organized with multiple subpages.

b.   Easy navigation

A good web site allows consumers to navigate easily and gives them the possibility of switching to the other page, and return to the previous one.

c.   Interesting content

The content of the website should be not only informative and relevant, but also written in interesting, original way.

d.   Speed

Consumers do not want to waste time on slow sites,so it is recommended that the site does not contain a lot of large format photographs as well as videos and animations that can slow search.

e.   Key words

The search is done mostly through a few key words. Companies for web presention of their business should choose keywords that will allow visibility to consumers who are looking for services that the company offers.

Since the successful formula for designing web site is not final and must be changed during the time, authors believe that some rules should be added:

f.   Interactivity

Be sure to set the page "questions and answers" which contains basic questions of site visitors (FAQ) to related products and services.

g.   Transparency

A great way to build credibility of the company, ie. to make sure that users of services believe that you sell products or services that are really worth is to engage comments of satisfied and dissatisfied customers. Replies to suggestions of dissatisfied users are equally important and as comments of the satisfied.

h.   The simplicity of the purchase of services or booking

If a visitor wants to buy a product or service, we should help him to do so. He should not be allowed to hesitate. Potential buyer must be explained what he needs to do, in the simplest way. If the user wants to buy a product or service, a good practice is the existence of a link: CLICK HERE to order goods or services "X". There should be precise instructions and explainations   of what you can expect when you click on a link that takes you to a page for ordering.

i.   Making contact

Most of the visitors who visit the   site for the first time will not make a purchase. They usually come to inform themselves   about the offer. It is important to make contact with potential customers, to find a way to collect e-mail addresses. One way is to sign a free electronic magazine, that is newsletter. By realizing the contact, there is a possibility   to create a user base so that they can be regularly informed about new products, services, promotions. Optional registration gives an excellent opportunity that website visitors become customers and thus to maximize sales.

4.   Pages on social networks – customers expect from you on a regular basis, almost

immediately, to respond to comments and to update your page regularly, if in the tourist company or hotel there is no person in charge of these activities, you can get only the opposite affect.

If the tourist company or hotel company comply with the previously mentioned suggestions, they enter a good e-communication with customers, which in the opinion of many authors can lead to the following positive effects:

- Connecting with consumers,
- The deepening of existing relationships with consumers,
- Providing information about their own offer,
- Reducing the loss of information,
- The effectiveness of communication with consumers,
- Active formation of consumer attitude
- Involving consumers in the system of value. (Đukić, S., 2011)

Users, as active participants in the e-communication, expect to receive in e-communication a recommendation that will help them in the evaluation and comparison of alternatives as the stages immediately prior to the decision of purchasing the services. Recommendations have always been an important factor in business success. Prior to the implementation of ICT, recommendations were transmitted orally or in writing and were normally restricted to a limited circle of people, mostly friends and family. Internet and e-communications have significantly altered today's ways of obtaining recommendations in tourism. Reviews and comments (satisfaction or dissatisfaction) of the guest, are visible on the web site or on pages of tourist companies or specialized sites for this purpose, such as TripAdvisor.

Numerous studies have examined the impact of social media on consumer behavior in the field of tourism. Research conducted by Fotis and associates (Fotis, J., 2012) showed that respondents consider the comments from social networks more reliable than the information that can be found on the official websites, in travel agencies or in advertisements. Most people admit that the comments from social networks have influenced their plans for travel with more than half of people surveyed and 65% report that they have made some changes in their original plan, while 15% of respondents admitted that they have made major changes to their original plan, as a direct result of the experiences of other people that are available on social networks.

Recommendations from satisfied customers are the strongest marketing tools, knowing this fact, a large number of tourist companies decide to enable guests comment on the presentation or the web page of the company on social networks. However, the negative comments should be seen as an opportunity for the company, first to demonstrate a willingness to respond disgruntled guest, correct mistakes or give a reasonable explanation. Research suggests that if a product or service have a higher number of on-line assessment then the quality of these comment, in fact, is crucial for the deciding whether to purchase or not that product or service. A poll made by website TripAdvisor revealed that more than half of the respondents , 53% , will not make a reservation if a hotel does not have a rating. Research conducted in Ireland showed, based on an analysis of 60 000

comments in the period from 2007. to 2009. that 64% of the hotels, which had average rating between 2 and 3 increased their average rating over 4. This tells us that the poor rated hotels understood the impact of consumer reviews on their business and have decided to improve their services to restore and fix their position on the tourist market (Padraig Cunningham, BS, 2010).

One of the important factors that could affect the character of on-line recommendation is the author's reputation. There are studies that suggest that, the so-called "opinion leaders", or people who wrote a lot of ratings, are usually the most influential. As for the motivation of the user to write on-line reviews, researches say that good will, praise or help other users are main motives for them to write. Less than a fifth of respondents (18.9%) believe that if there is one company which made some damage to them, they need to do the same, and 10.3% of respondents reported that by writing on-line assessment they actually get a chance to take revenge. However, it is important to distinguish the true from the false recommendations. Studies have shown that there are certain rules to identify fake comments. These rules will not be discussed in this paper, we will only emphasize that it is important, for both consumers and companies, to detect and eliminate false comments .

There is a very significant benefit from the data collected from the user, either on the basis of data that they left in their profiles on the website or on the basis of the comments left on social networks. Using modern information techniques of tourism companies, hotel companies could come up with important information concerning service users and their habits. We can recognize interests, needs and preferences of service users, based on which we can make a user profile. "Perfectly tailored offer" is offered to the appropriate profile on the e-communication channels. So you can keep the old guests but also attract new ones.

As the most important IT techniques for this purpose, we will single out data mining and web mininig. Karathiya (Karathiya, M. B., 2012) and colleagues defined data mining as the process of analyzing large amounts of data, looking for previously unknown patterns, trends and relationships in order to generate information for better decision making. Data mining involves the implementation of various algorithms that enable the finding of various forms in a large number of data. Web mining refers to the search for information available on the Internet. At the present time, there is no longer a question of whether the information is already available on the Internet but we have to to find a way to get to it quickly. Web mining includes algorithms for finding useful information based on hyperlinks, content of pages and user accounts.

When with on-line recommendations in the e-communication we add advertising on the Internet, we get well designed marketing of travel agency or hotel company. Advertising on the Internet is a set of strategies and techniques that use the Internet as a channel for business communications to support the exercise of general marketing objectives of the organization or company. In our country the most widespread advertising is through Facebook and Google Adwords.

4. THE SURVEY OF REPRESENTATION OF E-COMMUNIVATION IN TOURIST OFFER OF ZLATIBOR

Zlatibor as a tourist destination, which offers a variety of content to tourists throughout the year, with realized 1 200 000 registered overnight stays during the year, represents a serious tourist center and certainly falls into the category of the most attractive destinations in Serbia.

In this paper we deal with the level of implementation of modern IDT in the tourist offer of Zlatibor, with special emphasis on e-communication with users of tourist services.

The analysis was conducted based on the rules and suggestions given in the preceding section, which represent some, not all aspects of the application of modern ICT. The items on which we rely in this analysis of application of ICT in the tourist offer of Zlatibor are:

1. The importance which modern ICT can have on a successful business on the travel agencies and hotel companies.

2. Reputation and brand image in the virtual world of travel agencies and hotels is an increasingly important aspect of the overall business.

3. Tourists increasingly use the Internet in all the five phases of purchasing services.

4. E-communication is a very important segment of business because it is a way of informing the user, the model for the formation of relationships with service users and form of marketing.

This research we conducted by observation method, synthesis and analysis and inductive-deductive method. We just put ourselves in the role of service users and set out to cruise the virtual sky of Zlatibor.

We investigated the presence of the following forms of e-communication in travel agencies and hotel companies:

1. **Web site**
2. **Facebook page**
3. **Twitter account**
4. **YouTube channel**
5. **TripAdvisor**

. In this analysis we will differ hotel offering from offers of other facilities (resorts, guest houses, inns, villas, etc.). The reason is simple, from the total the number of available beds only ¼ belongs to hotel accommodation.

Number of hotels on Zlatibor is small, maybe 10, and therefore there is a general impression that most of them make efforts in e-communication with their customers. Most of them have well-designed Internet presentation, which generally meets the criteria listed above in this paper and that can be used in a standard way to perform on-line reservation of accommodation. Three hotels Hotel Mona, Hotel Palisad and Hotel Idila are available through all forms of e-communication that we investigated. Other hotels have a Facebook page, some of them, Twitter account, and some of them Instagram instead of Twitter , a YouTube account, but not all, and it is common to have 3 channels of communication in

addition to the web site. All hotels are available on TripAdvisor, but none of the hotels is responding to user comments. Evaluation and impressions are present on Facebook site of the hotel, but the hotels are not responding to guests here, either. Sometimes, there is some response, mostly on positive comments. We can conclude that the hotels recognize the importance of e-communication with the guests, but they lack link in this chain of communication - deepening relationships with customers by responding to positive and negative comments.

The virtual sky of other tourism organizations and companies on Zlatibor is not as rosy as above the hotels of Zlatibor.

What surprises the user when he searches for the first time is that most web sites that appear as a result of the keywords Zlatibor and Zlatibor accommodation do not belong to tourism companies. Although officially Zlatibor has 11 travel agencies, more than half only offer accommodation in buildings owned by them and only deal with these transactions. Three agencies, beside offering accommodation, also organize excursions. On the virtual sky of Zlatibor there are already a lot of factors that are not travel agencies, which publish their own Internet space rentals in the form of ads. There are also web sites that offer a huge number of units, mainly apartments, with no or very weak mechanism of search (filters). Facebook pages, if there are any, are mainly used for various posts of events on Zlatibor, which is of course beneficial in the category of activity but not in the category of accommodation. Tips and comments of the guests relate mainly to Zlatibor as a destination, and just few comments relate to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the accommodation. Search for any potential user therefore becomes largely random and unincorporated. For the purpose of the reservation of accommodation users are forced to open presentations of one by one unit without the possibility of comparing alternatives, and then to apply the old ways of obtaining information-phone, because normally, there is no information about availability. A number of units have their own Internet sites, but it is impossible to estimate the number of the total offer. We have found that a number of properties have serious web presentations which meet most of the above mentioned criteria, and a considerable number of them has their own Facebook page. But on the Facebook pages there is a lack of real communication with users. There are no comments yet, not of a large number compared to the number of followers, but mostly answers of service provider are missing. Twitter account is rare.

As for on-line bookings, it is possible for a limited number of accommodation. Mostly, it refers to accommodation present in the world Booking.com website, a total of 120 objects. When we consider the number of available beds in private accommodations, about 20 000 registered, that number is almost negligible. On a couple of sites we observed some kind of booking system where the user leaves the information and dates, and service providers should respond by e-mail on request. It often happens that there is no answer.

The presence of private accommodation on Tripadvisor is very poor, a total of 13 apartments. This is insignificant compared to the total number of properties. Number of customer reviews is very small, but to them there is no response from service providers.

In chaotic virtual world of Zlatibor we noticed two examples of good practice. Portal of Zlatibor, with the title Zlatibor, strange and magical power, at domain www.zlatibor.rs is the first and the authors add a true portal of Zlatibor. In this paper, the subject of research was travel agencies, but this portal does not present travel agency. We have singled it out because it captivates with its interesting content and dynamism among other things it connects the user with providers of tourist services such as accommodation and tours. This portal offers a number of information well organized in several parts, so that it can meet the very different needs of site visitors. Filter for search of accommodations with the specified criteria is among the first to implement and first to set webcam. It is available to its visitors through multiple channels of communication and invests energy in communication with the users, of course, with limited topics, which was not the subject of our discussions in the second part of this paper.

Portal of Tourist Organization of Zlatibor also allows website visitor systematic information on possible activities, upcoming events, accommodations, etc. It is available in more communication channels than those we observed in this analysis. However e-communications developed by this portal has a theme, mainly related to Zlatibor as a mountain.
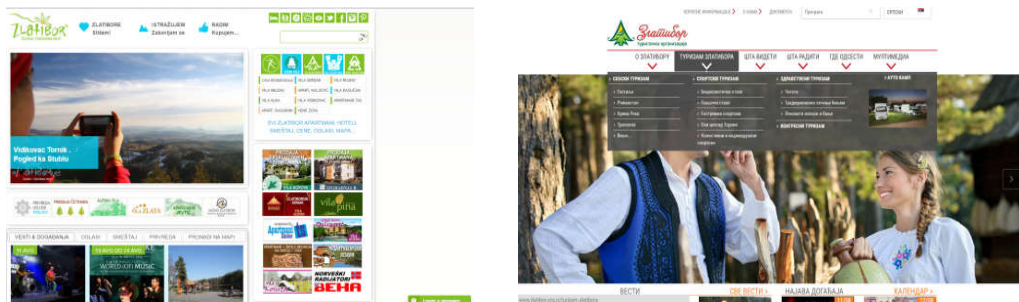

Figure 2: *The first portal about Zlatibor,* www.zlatibor.rs *and web presentation of tourist organization Zlatibor www.zlatibor.org.rs*

5. CONCLUSION

In tourist offer of Zlatibor   modern information and communication technology is present to a certain extent, and now additional efforts are needed for further systematic and strategic implementation of ICT, which will, with innovative management, marketing and vision lead to increased profitability, efficiency, service improvement and provide long-term prosperity. This is primarily related to private accommodation facilities, which make ¾ of Zlatibor accommodation capacities. Information about services is present, but should be further organized to help customers   get it easily. This can be done through efficient filters to the web site that will extract the data from a multitude of those that match specified criteria from the user. Web presentations of facilities must include information about the availability, and it would be a good idea to include a system for booking. Offer

should be transparent by introducing guest reviews and evaluation by the user. Electronic and on-line communication is very important even for small tourism enterprises. These technologies allow to establish direct contact with clients, then reduce the cost of "distribution" services and they are characterized by great efficiency and speed in the execution of business operations. It is necessary to represent e-communications and regularly maintain through multiple communication channels: e-mail, blog, web site, Facebook, TripAdvisor, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, etc. In addition, customer service can be provided with a system for recommendation, so every guest will be able to find the perfect offer for himself, and it would contribute to customer's satisfaction .

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