THE MODEL OF TOURIST VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGEMENT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. Building numerous and active virtual tourist communities involved in the tourist brand, connected with product, attraction or travel destination is a significant challenge for a dynamic and competitive tourist market. The main aim of presented pilot study was the drawing up guidelines for development of users engagement of selected virtual tourist communities on the example of Facebook. For that purpose a ranking of the most popular indicators of thematic areas, around which virtual tourist communities are formed was built. Simultaneously a typology of members of virtual tourist communities was presented as well as motives for the participation in communities gathered around the definite subject matter were analysed.

Keywords: tourism, virtual community, Facebook, engagement.

JEL Classification: Z19.

Introduction

Engagement is defined as a specific relationship between the consumer and the object of engagement (Brodie *et al.* 2013). This phenomenon is also seen as a kind of attachment to the object (product, service), available in the market offer (Higgins, Scholer 2009). According to Hollebeek (2010), engagement, in strictly tourist terms, can be viewed from the perspective of the mutual interaction taking place between tourists and other objects, such as tourist attractions, reception areas, brand names, trademarks, etc. One of the main paradigms associated with the consumption of tourism products and services is the growing role and importance of the information and communications technology (ICT) (Sotiriadis, van Zyl 2013), whose vivid example is the phenomenon of social networking sites (SM, Social Media).

The aim of the present study was to provide a basis for constructing a model of effective management of the virtual tourist community, functioning in social media. These assumptions are based on the basis of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of Internet resources, and using the obtained results of the pilot survey.

1. Previous research

The use of the social media in tourism is an important research area. There are numerous reports of the indeterminacy of the role of social media in tourism and multidisciplinarity of the potential research in tourism (Thomas *et al.* 2011; Liburd 2012; Zeng, Gerritssen 2014). Jacobsen and Munar (2012), as well as Munar and Jacobsen (2014) analyze ways to use the social media in the planning of tourist activity of the users. In turn, Alford and Clarke (2009) describe the use of information technologies in tourism. Laroche *et al.* (2013) present supporting brand loyalty through the use of social media. Bandias and Gilding (2012) describe the possible use of the textual content created by users of the social media to create business value of the social media as an educational tool. Padilla-Meléndez and del Águila-Obra (2013) suggest ways to use the social media in the creation of promotional activities of museums. Scott and Orlikowski (2012) recognize the impact of the social media on the market position of tourism companies. The impact of the social media on building a personal brand was described by Karaduman (2013), and the dynamics

of online communities was presented by Fortunati *et al.* (2013). About the marketing use of SM in the context of the involvement of users was reported by Frick (2010). The methodology for the analysis of User Generated Content in the context of building a competitive advantage of business entities was presented by He *et al.* (2013). At the same time, in the short time perspective, it is possible to significantly increase the importance of of the social media for the modern tourist as a source and space of the exchange of tourist information and as a dominant interpersonal contacts plane (Mobile social... 2010). The user interaction and participation on social media in consumption niche products describes Phang *et al.* (2013).

Social media are primarily their users. Bernett (2013) distinguishes 12 types of personality of SM users:
  – The Ultras – users almost obsessed with the social media, regularly checking the news and / or messages.
  – The Deniers – social media for these users are not an inevitable part of life.
  – The Dippers – users rarely using the social media, using them every other day, once every few days or once a week
  – The Virgins – users who are new to social media.
  – The Lurkers – users hiding in cyberspace, watching the statements of others, not showing any desire to participate in the conversations. 45% of Facebook users are characterized by these features.
  – The Peacocks – users seeking to have more friends, likes than that their own friends.
  – The Ranters – users in everyday life, during virtual activity are very active, stubborn, etc.
  – The Ghosts – creating anonymous users profiles, in order to increase the level of personal security often using false data.
  – Changelings – a group of about 5% of Facebook users who create entirely new personalities so that in the real world, no one recognized them.
  – The Quizzers – active users on the network, asking more questions than posting photos, messages, status updates.
  – The Informers – users wishing to gain popularity by sharing exciting new content with friends and supporters.
  – The Approval - seekers – users, who after the release of the content are committed to tracking the resulting interactions.

Dippelreiter *et al.* (2008) divide the interactions of SM users oriented towards tourism in two basic types. The first type includes the interactions involving simple, virtual communication, while the second involves the exchange and sharing of information or commenting on own tourism activity and that of others. Both types of interactions serve

to achieve a more complete perception of the surrounding reality and removing the uncertainty associated with the operation and social activity of individuals, in a broad, including tourist, perspective (Haenlein, Kaplan 2010).

Parra-López *et al.* (2011) defined the basic benefits of using MS in tourism (functional, psychological and hedonic and social). Szacka (2003) believes that the operation of the user within the virtual community helps in meeting a range of psychological and emotional needs, which include: the need for respect, recognition, importance in a group, belonging to a group, acceptance, confirmation of self-esteem, development of existing skills and interests.

Based on the above study of literature, it was concluded that there are a little studies directly concerning the management of engagement of the virtual communites (Mollen, Wilson 2010; Hudson, Thal 2013; Hamilton, Alexander 2013). Simultaneously there are a single works focused on engagement of tourist virtual community (Cabiddu *et al.* 2014) which justifies the need for research in this area. The problem of tourist virtual communities is particularly important in view of the progressive digitization of society.

Analysis of user needs can be an important element in building involved virtual communities. Hence, the main scientific objective of the study was to provide a basis for the initial analysis and prioritization of factors of thematic areas related to tourism and determining the affiliation of the members of the virtual community. In such a case only internal factors will be taken into account, i.e. those relating to the needs and behaviours developed by the Information Society determined by them, which affect the decision concerning belonging to tourist virtual communities.

The main objective of the pilot study was to develop guidelines for building the enagagement of the users of a selected tourist community in social media.

Specific objectives related to the development of the methodological foundations for the construction of a ranking of the most popular thematic areas, around which virtual tourist communities are formed in the social media. Another aim was the practical verification of the typology of virtual tourist community members proposed by Bennett (2013) and building the ranking of thusly defined groups. The last objective of the work was related to the identification of needs causing the participation in communities centred around a specific theme. The realization of these goals will enable the establishment of guidelines for the model of management of the involvement of virtual tourist communities.

2. Methods

To achieve the objectives of the work, associated with the determination of the most popular thematic areas, around which virtual communities are focused, an overview of

Internet resources was used, using the method of quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

The first stage of the study involved the participation of 70 virtual communities centred around the theme of tourism and functioning on the Facebook social network . The selection of user groups was made with the use of a search engine integrated into the service. Three separate searches executed with the use of the following keywords: "tourism", "journey", "holiday". Among the results, respectively 43, 17 and 10 of the feedback results were selected for further analysis. The basic criterion for the classification was the close relationship of the obtained link to a page with tourism, and defining the group associated with it as a community. The resulting communities were grouped based on the author's classification system.

For qualitative studies of the selected virtual tourist communities the social media monitoring tools were used: *Wisdom* (http://www.wisdom.com), and demo versions *Sotrender* (http://www.sotrender.pl) and *Brand24* (http://www.brand24.pl).

In the second stage of the study and in order to identify the basic needs determining the activity of the users within the virtual tourist community, the diagnostic survey method with the use of a questionnaire was applied. The form of the questionnaire was sent electronically to the active members of the community (e.g. people commenting on the presented content), as well as was published on profiles of the identified virtual tourist communities.

The descriptive analysis included the results of the questionnaires received from the members of the community gathered around the two main thematic areas.

Due to the sample not being representative and the pilot nature of the research, the description of the results is limited to the presentation of simple descriptive statistics.

The research work was carried out in June and July 2014.

3. Results

After analysing the content of the profiles of the selected tourist communities, they were classified on the basis of a proprietary classification system, according to the subject

Table 1. The thematic areas focusing virtual tourist communities in the context of the number of members

No	Thematic area	Number of participants
1.	Travel reports	1 271 367
2.	Tourist entities	836 250
3.	Guidebooks and Tourist guides	210 595
4.	Other	17 725
5.	Tourist Events	16 434
6.	Tourist information	3 062

areas they represent. The occurrence of six major categories was determined: "travel reports" – 23 groups, "tourist entities" – 17 groups, "guidebooks and tourist guides" – 17 groups, "tourist events" – 10 groups, "tourist information" – 4 groups, and "other" – 2 groups.

Thusly defined thematic areas were hierarchized based on the number of users belonging to the relevant communities (Table 1).

It was found that the most popular subject area, around which the most numerous virtual communities are forming are "Travel reports". The smallest number of members characterize the community centred around the issues related to tourist information.

In order to determine the personality types of the members of the analysed virtual tourist communities and to identify the motivation affecting the membership of the users in these communities, a pilot survey was conducted. The studies involved 288 members of the analysed communities. The number of feedback forms received, in respect of the defined subject areas is as follows: Travel reports (116), Tourist entities (88), Guide books and Tourist guides (36), Tourist events (21) other (15), Tourist information (12).

Further analysis was based on the results obtained from members of the largest tourist communities and centred around the two most popular subject areas, i.e., „Travel reports" and „ Tourist entities".

Users active in virtual communities relating to the issues related to the most popular thematic category - „travel reports" are mainly women (60%). Single persons were in the majority (38%). Next, the people in an open relationship (36%) and married (26%). Respondents are young people, mostly between the ages of 18 and 28 (35%) and from 29 and 35 (22%), or between the ages of 36 and 45 (20%). The least-represented were people aged <17 years (10%) and >45 (13%).

In the case of communities relating to the thematic area „Tourist entities" most of the users were also women (57.95%). Dominated by young people aged 18 to 28 years old (44.32%) and from 29 to 35 (29.55%). Respondents in most cases were unmarried (56%). 27% of them remained in an open relationship, while 17% were married.

Table 2 shows the personality types of virtual tourist communities members gathered around the two analysed thematic areas, as declared by the respondents.

Both cases are dominated by the users strongly associated with social media (The Deniers), although in the case of the thematic area "travel reports" their share is relatively high and almost twice as high as in the case of communities related to tourist entities. A similar situation can also be observed in the case of The Ultras. In addition, respondents associated with communities built in the thematic area of "travel reports" declared a smaller number of personality types, which may suggest a more conscious membership in these groups.

Table 2. Ranking of the declared personality types of the members of virtual tourist communities, centred around selected thematic areas

No	Tourist entities. *n* = 88	No	Travel reports. *n* = 116
1.	The Deniers (21.59%)	1.	The Deniers 43%.
2.	The Quizzers (13.64%)	2.	The Ultras 16%
3.	The Informers (13.64%)	3.	The Dippers 11%
4.	The Dippers 12.50%	4.	The Informers 9%
5.	The Lurkers 7.95%	5.	The Lurkers 8%
6.	The Ultras 7.95%	6.	The Approval-seekers 8%
7.	The Approval-seekers 6.82%	7.	The Peacock 3%
8.	The Ranters 5.68%	8.	The Quizzers 3%
9.	The Changelings 4.55%	9.	The Virgins 1%
10.	The Ghosts 3.41%		
11.	The Peacock 1.14%		
12.	The Virgins 1.14%		

In response to the question about the main reasons for joining the selected virtual tourist communities, the respondents associated with the communities focused around the theme of "travel reports" in the first instance pointed to the need for self-fulfilment – 24% (developing interest). The second was the need of gaining recognition – 21% (willingness to increase the importance of oneself), and a group of factors associated with the need for belonging (the desire to meet new people – 13%, the desire to confirm self-esteem – 11%, the need for functioning in a group – 11%). The second group, in turn, contained the factors associated with the need for belonging – 29% (belonging to a group – 14%, meet new people – 14%, acceptance from the environment – 1%). Occasionally, however, the respondents pointed to the determinants specific to the need of recognition – 10% (the importance of oneself – 6%, respect for oneself – 4%). Details are presented in Table 3.

On the other hand, respondents associated with the profiles of tourist entities also pointed to the need for self-actualization – 61% (developing interests – 31%, development of abilities and skills – 21%, confirmation of self-esteem – 9%). The second group, in turn, were factors associated with the need for affiliation – 29% (belonging to a group – 14%, meeting new people – 14% acceptance of the surroundings – 1%). Occasionally, however, the respondents pointed to the determinants characteristic of the need for recognition – 10% (the importance of oneself – 6%, respect for oneself – 4%). Details are presented in Table 4.

At the same time, respondents connected with the subject of " tourist entities" indicated content elements, which they shared most often. Details are presented in Table 5.

Table 3. Ranking of the needs inducing users to join the analyzed virtual tourist communities in the thematic area of "travel reports".

No	[%] percent of answers	Need
1.	24%	Need to develop interests
2.	21%	Desire to increase the importance of oneself
3.	13%	Desire to meet new people
4.	11%	Desire to confirm self-esteem
5.	11%	Need to belong to a group
6.	8%	Development of skills and abilities
7.	7%	Increasing respect for oneself
8.	5%	Need for approval from the environment

Table 4. Ranking of the needs inducing users to join the analyzed virtual tourist communities in the thematic area "tourist entities".

No	[%] percent of answers	Need
1.	31%	Need to develop interests
2.	21%	Development of skills and abilities
3.	14%	Need to belong to a group
4.	14%	Desire to meet new people
5.	9%	Desire to confirm self-esteem
6.	6%	Desire to increase the importance of oneself
7.	4%	Desire to increase respect for oneself
8.	1%	Need for approval from the environment

Table 5. Ranking of pieces of content shared on community profiles associated with the thematic area "tourist entities".

No	Element of content	[%]
1.	Own photographs	20.65%
2.	Own video	18.29%
3.	Photographs from other sources	15.63%
4.	Information from other sources	12.09%
5.	Video from other sources	10.62%
6.	Content created using smartphones and uploaded to the internet	10.03%
7.	Sound files from other sources	5.01%
8.	Reports of current events	4.13%
9.	Original writings, or extensions of the available articles, etc.	2.06%
10.	Educational content	1.47%

Similar summary was made on the basis of the data obtained from the members of the community related to the thematic area "travel reports" (Table 6).

Respondents belonging to the communities associated with both of the analysed thematic areas agreeably indicated the leading role of the administrator / moderator of the content on the profiles in building user involvement. This role involves testing and the selection of the shared content, although it does not have to involve the analysis of personality profiles.

Below the main hypothesis, based on the obtained results and concerning future research model were presented. Based on these results, it was found that the virtual tourist communities cover a number of thematic areas. These areas are likely to have a direct impact on the number of communities,

Table 6. Ranking of pieces of content shared on community profiles associated with the thematic area „travel reports".

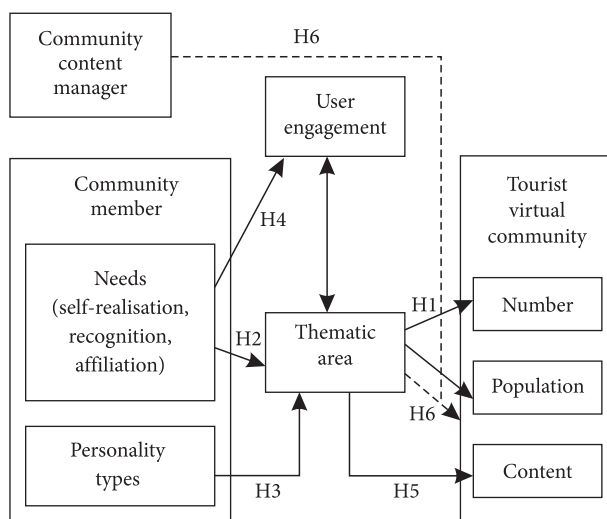| No	Element of content	[%]
1.	Own photographs	17%
2.	Content created using smartphones and uploaded to the internet	14%
3.	Photographs from other sources	14%
4.	Information from other sources	13%
5.	Sound files from other sources	11%
6.	Original writings, or extensions of the available articles, etc.	10%
7.	Own video	7%
8.	Reports of current events	7%
9.	Educational content	3%
10.	Video from other sources	3%
11.	Own sound files	1%

Fig. 1. The model of members of tourist virtual community engagement management

their size, and the level of involvement of the members (H1). The thematic area implies simultaneously the number and the diversity of personality types of the members of virtual tourist communities (H2). At the same time the diversity decreases for the communities directly related to the individual tourist activity and its documentation (H3).

The needs of users of virtual tourist communities are an important determinant of their functioning within groups, and the main one is the need for self-realization. The needs for recognition and membership do not constitute a major factor of involvement in the functioning of the virtual tourist community (H4).

The thematic area of the functioning of the virtual tourist community is also an important influence on the nature and type of the content of the shared elements and themes that are acceptable and commented on by their members (H5). The role of the administrator of a profile is the analysis, selection and appropriate placement of the content of the shared elements, accepted by the community, and thus to build user engagement (H6).

Graphic depiction of the model is presented below (Fig. 1).

Verification of the correctness of the model will require carrying out detailed research on virtual tourist communities that operate in Poland and other European Union countries.

Conclusions

The findings indicates that the development of interests and abilities were the main factors inducing users for joining the tourist virtual communities. The diversified arrangements of users personality types in different-thematic communities was also stated. The content consumption and sharing were also unsimilar between gropus.

The proposed theoretical model can serve as a basis for the efficient creation and management of the virtual communities concentrated around the diversified tourist activities as well as constitutes guidelines presenting the methodology of analysis of virtual tourist communities properties

The model can also provide an important theoretical contribution for the management of the image of a destination in the social media, as well as building and managing virtual communities engaged in the brand of a destination.

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