

ASSESSING THE ROMANIAN TOURISM IMAGE THROUGH THE EYES OF MILLENNIALS TO IMPROVE TOURISM MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research of the image of Romanian tourism using the Millennials generation as a sample to improve tourism management as vision and performance. The secondary objectives are to clarify the concept of millennials (trends and characteristics), to assess the image of tourism in Romania by the millennials generation and to highlight the effects this image produces in the strategic approach of tourism management. Travelling for the millennials generation starts on Facebook and takes place at the holiday destination, because 89% of them use Social Media as an inspiration for travelling. The results will contribute to improving the performance of tourism management through a better understanding of the preferences, desires and needs of the most attractive generation as a target market for tourism companies.

KEYWORDS: *management, Millennials, travel, tourism, Social Media*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism management has unique features, particularly related to the target market. Today's visitors want to be educated, informed, counselled and entertained in holiday places (Au-Yong-Oliveira et al., 2018). From passive tourists, we went to active tourists who ask for novelty, involvement, role-playing, animation (Kim et al., 2017). The answer to the new management requirements in tourism is to offer a variety of forms of communication that will be successful in every single targeted market (whether we are talking about seniors or young people).

Visitor flow management in demand-driven conditions brings to the forefront planning, programming and waiting issues, as well as the advance booking of tourist services and the determination of the maximum number of visitors admitted in a given time period (because the technical-material, anthropic and natural basis is limited in tourism).

Overpricing to manipulate and reduce the number of tourists in peak periods is a forced and unnecessary solution, but it is used. Buying the holiday packages on the Internet in advance and getting into various tourist attractions and concerts has made it easy to obtain tourist services at affordable prices. Thus, management was organized and the tourists have been satisfied.

Another feature of tourism management is the movement from the demand to the supply, the tourist will go to the holiday destination to enjoy the specific tourist attractions: sea, mountain, spa (Zhou, 2014; Stylidis et al., 2014). Tourists want to feel in control of the tourism they intend to pursue, and if they think they are being manipulated, reoriented in their choices, the level of satisfaction will decrease. That is why we consider tourism management to be "delicate" and maintaining the level

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of quality of tourist services that visitors want to receive is the central focus of the management strategy in tourism.

Tourism management involves planning, organizing, leading and controlling services that are intangible, unstable, heterogeneous, variable and inseparable (Wang et al., 2018, Styliadis et al., 2014; Hongmei et al., 2018, Carrasco-Gallego, 2017). What each feature means, and what its managerial implications are, will be enlarged upon in the paper.

Our concerns also address a niche of the tourism market, that of the "millennials" generation (Richardson & Thomas 2012). These are people currently aged between 18 and 38 (born between 1980 and 2000).

A generation is understood to be a group of people born in the same period of time and which has experienced the influence of the same cultural, social, political and economic events (Öter, 2011). Because of the external environmental factors that act mostly in formative years, each generation expects to have certain values and behaviour of consumption different from previous generations (Hur, 2017; Soroya, 2018).

We placed the Millennials between years 1980-2000. The Millennials generation is also known as The Net Generation or Generation Y. It is the generation following generation X (1965-1979).

Research on the millennials generation (ZenithOptimedia, 2015) shows that they want to have "memorable experiences," they are concerned with controlling their passions, are knowledgeable and educated, demanding, experienced, dependent on social networks. The "millennials" generation presents peculiarities of the tourist activities undertaken and of their consumption behaviour which will be highlighted in the paper. Thus, up to 97% of them will exhibit their experiences on social media holiday destination, 50% reserve last minute holidays and 60% are willing to pay for extra-services.

The image of the "millennials" generation of Romania from the tourism point of view is useful for tourism managers who want to adapt their holiday supply to this target market. It should be noted that among the values underpinning the "millennials" generation lie financial stability, career, education and enrichment of personal experiences through travel.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the millennials and their implications for tourism are multiple. Öter (2011) in his book "Tourism and Generation Y" investigates the complex behaviour of the Y generation (also called the Millennials generation) based on the effects of globalization and the Internet. Generation Y takes the Social Networks into account in travelling, has an adventurous spirit and wants to experience unknown destinations for the general public (Stewart et al., 2017, Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014, Kosterlitz & Lewis 2017, Fyall 2017, Godelnik, 2017). The Millennials Generation have ever-growing consumer budgets, and have a higher purchasing power than other consumer segments, hold management positions, including in travel companies (Carrasco-Gallego, 2017; Delbosc & Nakanishi, 2017, Kim, 2018, Koe et al., 2012).

The immateriality of services (cannot be touched, tasted, or felt before their purchase and experimentation) provides creative management with creative thinking in the sense of tangible services by physical evidence such as a professional look of employees, a clean headquarters and a strong brand image of trust for consumers (Avraham, 2016). Services are produced exactly when consumed (they are unstable and perishable). Thus, a place not sold today in a hotel, or on a plane will remain lost forever, being unable to be recovered tomorrow. Management strategies must strictly predict the number of holidays offered on the tourist market so as to make a profit, providing consumers with the confidence that they have guaranteed holidays.

Services depend on who provides them, the skills, knowledge of serving staff, and even customers are part of the production process (a concept called *servuction*). The staff has a major effect on the perception of the quality of service offered (Richardson & Thomas, 2012).

The services are variable and heterogeneous and are composed of many suppliers in the distribution chain (from travel agents, holiday guides to hoteliers, restaurateurs and animators). The managerial control implications are extremely difficult to achieve at every moment of the value chain of serving and offering tourist services (Pantelescu & Ioncica, 2012).

Returning to the target group of the Millennials, they have the following basic features (Gallicano, 2013; Lissitsa & Ofrit, 2016; Polzin et al., 2014, Mody et al., 2017; Albert da Silva et al. 2018, Delbosc & Nakanishi, 2017): they are addicted to technology, to social media channels, 75% of them appreciate more a flexible job than a high salary, and 70% believe that office presence should not be mandatory, 35% start their own business, 89% use Social Media as an inspiration for the next holiday, 90% compare touristic offers on online sites, 60% are willing to pay for extra-services, 97% will exhibit their vacation experience on Facebook and Instagram, 70% will remain loyal to the tourist brand that has given them a memorable experience in a positive sense, benefits, guidance, counselling, holiday guides, 50% will buy their holidays from last-minute offers.

The Millennials generation is highly sought after by brands that fight for it, because it represents the market that has matured, has revenue and decision-making power over budgeting for travel and shopping (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014; Kim, 2018). The Millennials generation is the generation that has reached consumer maturity and consumption takes place 85% on-line, with an upward trend (Kim et al., 2017, Öter, 2011).

Every performant management starts from knowing its clients – their preferences, expectations, needs, profile, values, wishes, and concerns, areas of activity targeted, degree of experience, budget, and passions.

Business development and service improvement are based on the knowledge of the market you are operating on and the customer segments which you target.

Social Media has transformed tourism through Online Reviews (89% of millions of people plan their trip based on friends' reviews and things posted by their friends online); the rapid ability to get customer feedback, post online holiday vacation photos and videos, has moved travel agencies to the online environment.

Unique experiences guaranteed to customers and their posting on social media have revolutionized the management of tourism brands, which also use social media to create a positive brand image, increase brand loyalty, provide on-line tourist services at the destination holiday.

In Romania, domestic tourism (Romanian tourists' arrivals in accommodation spaces in Romania) recorded 9.4 million tourists in 2017, up 74% compared to 2007 (INS, Tempo-online, 2018). In 10 years growth is significant for the development of tourism practiced by Romanians within the country. In 2007, 5.4 million Romanian tourists chose Romania as a holiday destination, in 2012 the number went up to 6 million, in 2013 8.5 million tourists, and in 2017 to 9.4 million tourists were accommodated in the tourist units in Romania. The year 2016 compared to 2017 shows an increase of 10.6%, a positive and beneficial trend for tourism in Romania. 57% of these tourists are the Millennials generation.

3. METHODS

The research used the questionnaire with closed questions, among them 6 demographic questions and 10 specific questions that aimed at assessing the image of Romanian tourism. The target group was represented by people aged 18 to 38. According to the Romanian Statistical Yearbook (2017), there were 5,285,091 persons aged between 18 and 38 years old. The observation and sampling unit was the same in this case, namely the individual. The construction of the sample of the research was carried out using the simple random sampling method, the implementation of which led to the making of 384 questionnaires, using the following formula:

$$n = t^2 * p(1-p) / \Delta\omega^2 \quad (1)$$

The coefficient $t(1,96)$ corresponds to a probability of 95% guarantee of results and an acceptable limit of 5%. The interviews took place at the Romanian Tourism Fair, Romexpo, Autumn Edition, 16-19 November 2017.

The demographic characteristics of the representative sample were: occupation (34% students, 50% employees / employees, 6% employers and 10% self-employed / entrepreneurs); studies (41% high school, 53% faculty (bachelor and master), 6% postgraduate studies); gender (45% male, 55% feminine); age (18-24 years 34%, 25-31 years 35%, 32-38 years 31%); income (less than 1500 RON 30%, between 1500 and 3000 RON 55%, over 3000 RON 15%); urban background (100%), Romanian nationality (100%).

4. RESULTS

The results of the research of the image of Romanian tourism from the Millennials perspective represent a novelty element for the Romanian tourism management and brings important solutions and practical ideas for attracting (and not losing) this clientele segment.

In the proportion of 56%, respondents consider the image of Romanian tourism to be good, while 44% consider the image of Romanian tourism as poor. From the point of view of tourism, Romania has beautiful landscapes, special tourist attractions, monuments of nature of real tourist value, rich natural resources, and scenery of rare beauty. In the last 5 years investments have been made in the renovation and creation of new technical-material bases (all-inclusive hotels, resorts, new tourism equipment from European money or own funds), beach development (Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Constanta - from the Regional European Development Fund, Neptune, Venus, Saturn).

The image perceived as weak uses as arguments the problems related to infrastructure and the access routes to tourist attractions, dirt, rubbish, pollution, lack of cleanliness in accommodation, lack of qualified staff, cultural buildings and deserted hotels that ruin the look of the holiday resort, uneducated people. Of the total number of respondents, 80% consider that the insufficient promotion of the Romanian tourism has led to the depreciation of its image and 78% say that the Romanian tourism situation is on an ascending line.

According to the responses Millennials generation is connected to the internet and addicted to Smart phones. 72% of 18-38-year-olds check Facebook as soon as they wake up. 67% stated that they are chatting more online than they do in real life. At the question „Do you usually lose sleep due to staying up late on the internet checking for Romanian holidays special offers?” 60% said Yes, 36% said No, and 4% cannot say.

The Millennials generation chose Mamaia for the best picture resort in Romania, followed by Sibiu, Poiana Brasov, Sighisoara, Sinaia, Eforie Nord, Predeal. Mangalia Resort was the last in terms of tourist image. In Mangalia the Callatis festival was held every summer (from 2015 this did not take place with the effect of depreciating the image in the eyes of the consumers of tourism). Everything reflects on the satisfaction of the tourists (every action taken).

To the question "How satisfied are you with the aspects regarding the Romanian tourism, in terms of the quality of the tourist services in relation to the prices practiced, the behaviour of the tourism staff, the tourist infrastructure, the offers and the promotional packages, the scores (using the Likert Scale) are presented in Figure 1. The Likert scale takes values between -2 and +2, where -2 represents "very unsatisfied" - 1 "unsatisfied", +1 "satisfied", +2 "very satisfied".

Poorly developed infrastructure in Romania is the main reason for dissatisfaction among interviewees (-0.6). The lack of access ways prevents cultural tours in Brasov, Iasi, Cluj, Timisoara, but especially in their surroundings. Extremely beautiful tourist attractions seen at the cost of destroying the personal car by the tourist never achieve a good image. The development of Sibiu was largely based on investments in local infrastructure, cleaning, renovation of the Old Center (Piața Mare and Piața Mică), restoration of cultural sites.

The behaviour of tourism staff is often deficient. The respondents complained that tourism staff is stressed and is not smiling. Also, the respondents perceived tourism staff unprepared and sullen.



Figure 1. The Millennials Generation's satisfaction with Romanian tourism

Source: carried out by the authors on the basis of the research undertaken

Promotional offers and packages get a score of 0.9 and this is a positive one for the image of tourism in Romania. In recent years, reductions, holiday packages "The Seaside for All" have been created; holiday vouchers have boosted the tourist market and offered to the Romanians a holiday in the country worth 1450 lei / employee. It aims at boosting domestic tourism and creating financial facilities to stay in the country for the holidays. Relaxation involves not only financial factors, but also those who care for quietness, cleanliness, kindness, diversity in the services offered, animation and fun at the holiday place.

The highest score of 1.02 is recorded by the quality / price ratio, so tourists (who are thinking about not having too high expectations so as not to be disappointed) have been satisfied, in the last period of the quality received for the price paid. Especially, this has been observed in rural areas such as Moeciu, Biertan, Maramureş, Râncea, Viseu de Sus, Sighişoara, Gura Humorului, Sovata, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Haţeg, Bucovina.

5. DISCUSSION

The implications of research for tourism management are beneficial. Thus, tourism managers know better the image of Romanian tourism from the point of view of the Millennials generation in our country. Tourism managers must understand the young Romanians, "What do they like?", "What don't they like?", "What are their tastes when travelling?".

In tourism the seasonality affects staff stability, staff fluctuations reach percentages of up to 36% (the program is intense, in shifts, they work on Saturdays and Sundays, and salary levels are the

minimum wage at the level of the whole economy). In this case the managers must adopt staff motivation strategies, e.g. paid trainings, overtime pay, a hot meal per day.

Managers must now lead with focus on the future and must remain very open to us, try to evolve every day, for example to offer free Wi-Fi in the tourist resort, which is happening, and customers are happy with this. The Millennials generation wants everything in digital form, access to virtual resources, and even virtual city tours. They will share anything they find at the destination, if it's okay or if it's bad, for them the media coverage is primordial, they'll take pictures, videos, Instastory, they'll give feedback about the holiday destination on the socializing channels, tips, and some of them will post their experiences on their blogs.

Facebook, Instagram and Google are the top three social media where holidaymakers are displaying holiday testimonials. E.g. "The breakfast was very good with a large selection of foods to choose from. The staff is very nice and good. "

Google will still be the place where most people search for business, brand information. Talking after a sale is good for doing business in tourism, it shows you what needs to be changed, polished, and improved.

Facebook will continue to be the place where most people will make the first reviews in the tourist resort about experienced services in terms of facilities, cleanliness, free Wi-Fi, location, staff, comfort and value for money.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The views are divided on the image of the Romanian tourism perceived by the Millennials generation, 56% consider that the image of tourism in Romania is good and 44% claim that the image of tourism in Romania is poor. The image of poor Romanian tourism is argued by the following: insufficient promotion, lack of infrastructure, lack of staff training, precarious cleanliness. The image of good Romanian tourism is supported by the beauty of natural landscapes, the richness of natural resources, resorts in which funds have been strongly invested from the Regional Development Programs from European Funds, the introduction and growth of all-inclusive offers, multiple Wi-Fi, counselling on the part of tour operators through qualified staff.

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Managers must now lead with focus on the future and must remain very open to the new, try to evolve every day in line with consumer preferences. They have to position themselves in the online environment, create travel sites to promote holiday offers, beautiful design, engaging photos and fascinating texts to motivate tourists to make the buy. All content must be true to reality and loyalty programs should be numerous.

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