

The Necessity of Using Social Networks in Contemporary Tourism Industry and the Tourist Organization of Serbia

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ABSTRACT

The practice so far has shown that the tourist destination is managed through the public sector, private companies or according to the model of public-private partnership. Modern business and everyday life is unthinkable without the use of social networks and e-marketing. There is an unbroken link between the products of the information sector, social networks and everyday business and private communications. Tourism as a service activity is particularly dependent on social networks. Potential buyers of tourism products with just “one click” can book, pay for the service, view the pictures and read comments about the desired destination. Using concrete data and business on National Tourism Organisation of Serbia, the authors point to a growing trend of using social networks in presenting Serbia as a desirable destination. Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS) uses integrated on-line marketing for promotive activities and targeting marketing campaigns. This paper discusses the importance and role of the public sector as a way of managing a tourist destination through TOS, but with synergetic effects with the use of social networks.

Key words: *tourism industry, social networks, Tourist Organisation of Serbia (TOS), digital promotion*

JEL Classification: Z30, L83, L86

INTRODUCTION

The end of the XX and the beginning of the XXI century is characterized by a significant development of information technologies, which can even be called a revolutionary turn, that has affected all segments of life. Business in all areas have significantly accelerated, facilitated, shortened in time, also the needs for some new professions have emerged, and largely have become internationalized as geographical distance has become a relative category. Development of information technologies has all also influenced the changes in everyday life. The average person life, who has access to this technology has also changed dramatically and accelerated. On the one hand, business activities can be completed more quickly, and on the other hand, there is enough free time to do other activities, thanks to advanced technology. Life without the Internet has virtually become unthinkable. It can even be said that people have become “addicted” to monitoring current “just-in-time”. They usually carry a mobile phone, tablet or computer with

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them, so they can follow events on social networks in a timely manner, respond to messages, take pictures of different events and simultaneously post them on social networks.

The younger generation can say that "if an event was not recorded with a cellphone camera and if it was not immediately posted on one of the social networks, the event did not even happen." An ordinary day cannot be imagined without browsing through email, Instagram, Facebook and other social networks. This has certainly made life easier and more interesting, but it has in some ways led to alienation, as deals that took place tet-a-tet are now done via Skype and other mobile applications using the possibility of simultaneous visual contact with the interviewee. This issue is the subject of serious analysis of sociological, psychological and ethical research.

As all activities are covered by this process, neither the tourism industry nor the dominant tertiary (labor-intensive, service-oriented) has remained immune to new ways of communication and advertising. Following the business trends and the new concept of life of the potential consumer, tourism companies have embraced information technology as the dominant way of conducting all business activities.

This particularly applies to the field of marketing. To facilitate and accelerate the communication process with business partners and customers, e-commerce has become a *conditio sine qua non*. Although there are many forms of digital marketing, the subject of this paper is to analyze the impact of social networks on promotion (Ilić, 2018). As the Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS) is the main carrier of the formation of a national brand and the promotion of tourism, the focus in analyzing the impact of social networks on marketing will be viewed from the point of view of the impact on this irreplaceable institution for Serbian tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fahy and Jobber (2006) consider that marketing with the use of information technology could be defined as internet marketing, or marketing that fulfills its goals by using the Internet and technologies based on it. Tošić (2013) believes that internet marketing is part of the promotional mix. Of course, the author obtains that in addition to this form of promotional mix, classic forms such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling and direct marketing are still being used.

Nićić (2011) calls this form of marketing as electronic or e-marketing. The author points out that e-marketing encompasses all online and electronically based business activities that make it easier for manufacturers of goods and services to satisfy as many consumer desires and needs as possible in a faster and more efficient manner.

Almost three decades Buhalis (1998) highlighted the fact that consumers are aware of and familiar with increasing use of information technology. Consequently, potential consumers have more intensively started using different information tools for the purpose of organizing travel (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The use of social media has enabled the joint creation of tourism products, based on the experiences of other users of tourism services and their impressions (Sigala, 2008).

Bakić (2005) pointed out that the most significant changes in marketing, in addition to economic, demographic, natural, socio-cultural and political, in the future development of tourism will be felt most in the technological environment, precisely because of the intense reason of information technology. He states that advancements in the reservation systems (CRS) of airlines, reservation and management systems at hotel and travel agencies, rapid development of the data transmission network, electronic money, implementation of satellite links are leading to a new quality of marketing mix instruments. Along with these processes, there is a disintermediation, which can be seen through the disappearance of classical intermediaries in the market (classic tourist agencies), due to the increasing possibilities of direct sale through the use of information technologies (Spasić & Rabotić, 2008).

DIGITAL PROMOTIONAL MIX INSTRUMENTS

Effectively combining the four marketing mix instruments produces an effective marketing program that, above all, should provide value to consumers. Promotion, or marketing communication, is one of the elements of the marketing mix, which in order to be effective, must be coordinated with other marketing activities. Increasingly, the more comprehensive term Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is being used. The overall effect of coordinating different communication activities is greater when they are performed independently and in some cases in conflict with each other (Milojević & Mikić, 2017). The importance of online promotion is steadily growing and gaining importance in budgeting and marketing efforts - whether it is a text message that can change consumer behavior in the moment or keywords that can increase the number of queries or a contextual banner that changes attitudes or viral marketing that encourages people to talk about the product. Online channels can do what offline channels simply cannot, e.g. some websites can promote, communicate, and create a unique experience that is unique to online users. Although websites, by themselves, cannot be considered as a propaganda tool, they are an integral part of all ten elements shown in Table 1.

Table 1. On-line equivalent promotional assets

Promotional mix	Online equivalents
Advertising	Interactive ads, pay per click, search engine advertising
Sale	Viral Sales, Affiliate Marketing
Sales improvement	Incentives, rewards, online loyalty
Public relations	Social networks, links, newsletters, online editorials
Direct mail	Opt-in email when using e-newsletter, e-blast
Exhibitions	Virtual exhibitions
Product Display	Promotional ads at trade shows, personalized recommendations
Packaging	Virtual tours, really packed online
Oral propaganda	Viral marketing, referrals to friends via email and links

Source: Chaffey, Smith, 2008.

Four marketing mix instruments, first of all, should answer seven important questions: 1. defining the audience, 2. defining the goal of promotion, 3. determining the topic of addressing the market, 4. developing a clear message to be conveyed, 5. choosing the medium for conveying messages, 6. defining the budget for promotion and 7. determination of mechanisms of continuous control.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks are free, interactive Internet services that allow users to create public or semi-public pages with basic information about themselves, provide a list of users with whom they have a connection, and view and interact with their contact list (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). There are various types of social networks and they may be of a general type or may be specific to a particular geographical area, as well as to the occupations, interests and needs of users. The most popular social networks are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, WeChat and Instagram (Figure 1).

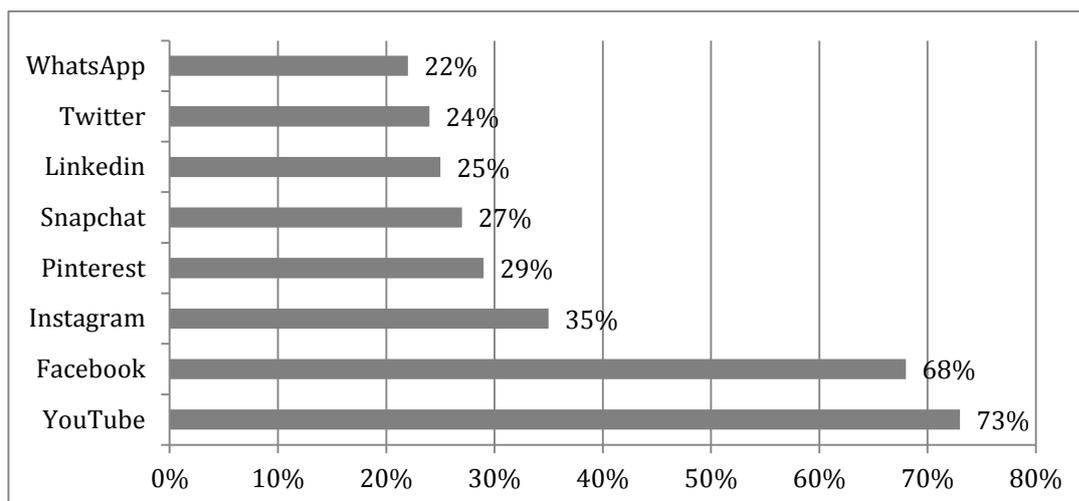


Figure 1. The world's leading social networks by number of active users

Source: Survey conducted, 2018. Pew Research Center

The three main arguments for using social networks in tourism are:

1. High targeting - easy to reach, and the promotion is tailored to market segmentation;
2. Measurability - any effort can be measured, and the result of the activity can be seen. Statistics can provide "tons of information", it's up to the company to analyze and use them regularly;
3. Accessibility and low prices - the use of social networks is generally completely free. In order to increase the effects of its business appearance, the company can also use various methods of paid promotion, which, in comparison with other media, is far cheaper and accessible to everyone (Stojković, 2013).

Many travelers "consult" social networks when planning a trip to find destinations, benefits, tips, and reviews from other travelers, but to what extent do social networks have the power to shape travel? Not only do social networks have an impact on travel planning, they are also very present and influential during the tourists' stay in a particular destination, but also upon their return from destination to the place of residence.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE TOURIST ORGANIZATION OF SERBIA ON THE INTERNET

Tourism Law of 1994 established the Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS), as the official carrier of the institutional promotion of tourism of the Republic. The activity of TOS is aimed at positioning the tourist product of Serbia in the domestic and foreign markets and tourist valorization of Serbia's comparative advantages, such as its geo-strategic position, historical, cultural and natural identity. In order to uniquely implement tourism information and propaganda activities, integrate Serbia's tourism space into European tourism itineraries and strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism development, TOS is present at all major tourism fairs worldwide, cooperates with other national tourism organizations and other international, regional and professional tourist associations.

In addition to the above activities, Tos is engaged in monitoring and placing the latest news in the field of tourism. New promotional activities can be noticed on the website:

- Projects from China and 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (China CEE 17+1), where applications for the prestigious Marco Polo Award are encouraged. This is a

logical sequence of activities, because in 2019, Serbia was declared one of the most promising destinations in China.

- TOS promotes specific destinations that it considers extremely attractive: Lepenski Vir, Gamzigrad, Studenica, Resava cave and Palić lake.
- TOS launches internal competitions for awards in the field of tourism in Serbia: exceptional destinations in Serbia - EDEN2019; Tourist flower, the best photo of Serbia and the like.

Use of the Website for the purpose of promoting tourism in Serbia

The website is an 'ID card' of every organization. Primarily, because it is the first meeting of a potential user of goods and/or services, in this case tourists, with the organization through the Internet. It can be said that a quality website is the equivalent of a smiling and kind person at the hotel reception, in terms of getting a first impression of the seriousness and quality of the organization/destination. Second, because any additional efforts made by the organization through the Internet are closely linked to the functioning of the Website. This should practically mean that without a quality website there is no successful web marketing. As for the history of using websites to promote Serbia as a tourist destination, it is also quite long.

The first website of the Tourist Organization of Serbia was published in 1997 and functions as a subpage of the website of the Faculty of Economics in Belgrade. It has been modified and modernized several times since 1997. It now operates under the domain <http://www.serbia.travel>. The current website of the Tourist Organization of Serbia is just over two years old. It was first presented at the Tourism Fair in Belgrade in 2016. It has since been used as the official website of this national tourism organization. At the bottom of the homepage are links to social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram, Pinterest and Tripadvisor. The introductory (home) page of a website is the page where the most important things are. If viewed from this side, it can be said that this web site fulfilled this role of TOS because everything that is most important for the tourists themselves is on the homepage, starting with the information about Serbia itself, through all the major events to various information related to tourism in Serbia. The presentation of tourism on the website is mostly dominated by pictures, which attracts tourists because the pictures best describe a particular destination.

USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN PROMOTION OF SERBIAN TOURISM

If we look at TOS activities on social networks, they can be divided into three groups:

1. Daily publishing of multimedia content in the form of photos, infographics, news, videos. Compared to last year, the novelty in this field was the development of special creative platforms (regular sections dedicated to specific topics that they publish in a specific term).
2. Organizing periodic campaigns: paid advertising campaigns and prize competitions.
3. Direct communication with interested citizens through responses to comments and private messages.

TOS profiles on social networks publish information, news, photos and other promotional materials, answer questions of users interested in Serbia's tourism offer, organize sweepstakes and publish competitions related to building an image and positioning Serbia's tourist offer on the domestic and world markets. The number of TOS followers on social networks has increased dramatically as a result of the excellent results that TOS sites achieve, which is the result of a long-term strategic appearance on social networks that results in a large interaction of users with published content. This is also the basic criterion that Facebook's algorithm takes into account when placing content as well as conducting an advertising campaign on TOS pages in

Serbian and English, their quality designing, which includes: target group selection, ad placement method, conceptual design, etc.

The rating of a tourist destination on social networks makes a great contribution to creating a pleasant image of a tourist destination. Thanks to the rating, a larger number of people participate in the exchange of opinions and experiences about a tourist destination, using social networks. Good publicity contributes to the development of the reputation of duristic destinations. Terms such as liking, sharing, blogging, tweeting, and the like have become part of an individual's everyday speech in this area as well.

Analysis of the Tourist Organization of Serbia Facebook page

The Tourist Organization of Serbia is present on the social network Facebook through Facebook pages. The Organization owns pages that are being updated in different world languages for different markets. The Tourism Organization of Serbia is also responsible for the site dedicated to TOS souvenir shops. TOS manages two souvenir shops in Belgrade. This TOS activity is promoted through the Instagram and Facebook page of Serbia Travel Souvenirs (@serbiatourism.souvenirs).

The site has existed since 2017 and was opened in parallel with the opening of the TOS gift shop near the Avala Tower. The Facebook page has 1740 likes, while its Instagram profile is followed by 452 people. The most interesting Facebook pages are the Tourist Organization of Serbia, the site that TOS has best developed and through which the largest number of advertising campaigns have been conducted and Serbia Travel, which TOS uses as a means of communication at the international level and through which all advertising campaigns are conducted globally. Content that is published daily on the site is planned two months in advance and depends on: marketing campaigns run by TOS at a given moment, tourist season, significant events, markets for which it is planned and availability of materials for creating posts.

Most of the audience is in the following two age groups: 25-35 and 35-44. The demographic structure of TOS's followers on Facebook shows that the women are in the majority (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

As for the posts themselves, TOS uses a variety of formats to properly convey the message to followers of the site, such as: status with a photo, video, event, note, poll, live stream, and Facebook Story.

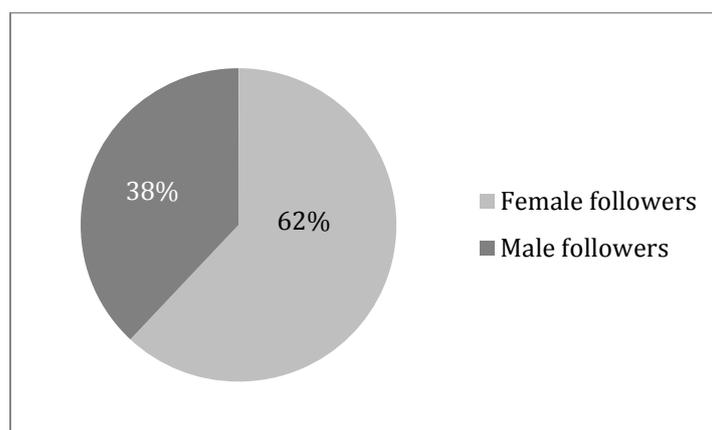


Figure 2. The demographic characteristics of the TOS Facebook page followers by gender

Source: <https://www.Facebook.com>

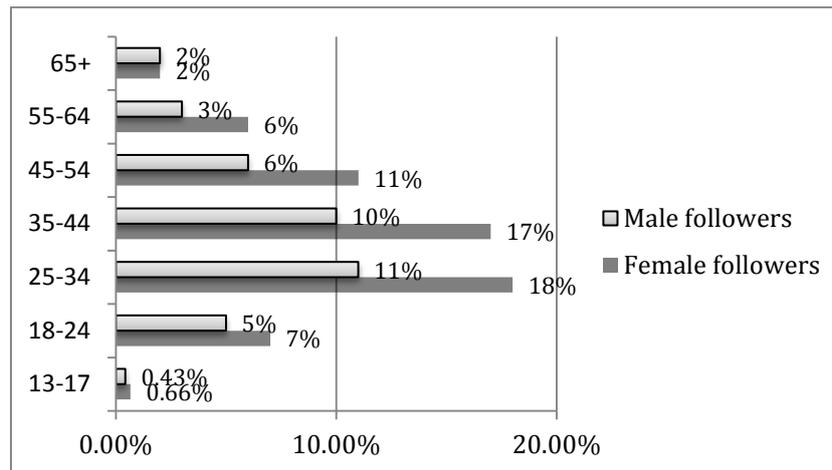


Figure 3. The demographic characteristics of the TOS Facebook page followers by age

Source: <https://www.Facebook.com>

Analysis of the Tourist Organization of Serbia Twitter account

TOS's Twitter account is currently followed by 27,800 Twitter users, including 129 followers with verified accounts. Interestingly, even though this is a TOS account that has the lowest number of followers compared to other social networks, and the only one has a verified profile tag. The account is updated daily with at least one tweet created by TOS and several retweets. The tweets mostly consist of a photo, branded with a logo, hashtag and slogan, and accompanying text. In addition, there are blogs about Serbia, as well as occasional surveys on Serbia's tourism offer.

Organizations such as the European Tourism Commission, the World Tourism Organization, the National Museum and other institutions on which Serbia's tourist offer depends, are most commonly retweeted; famous world media that broadcast a positive image on tourism in Serbia; local tourism organizations; influencers; but also smaller users who conceptualize their tweets to create a positive image of Serbia as a tourist destination, in a creative and receptive way for Twitter audiences. Tweets are written in English. At the top of the page is a tweet, related to the campaign TOS is currently running. The TOS account belongs to two lists, one is a list of all accounts of tourist organizations in Serbia and the other is a list of all Twitter accounts of national tourist organizations.

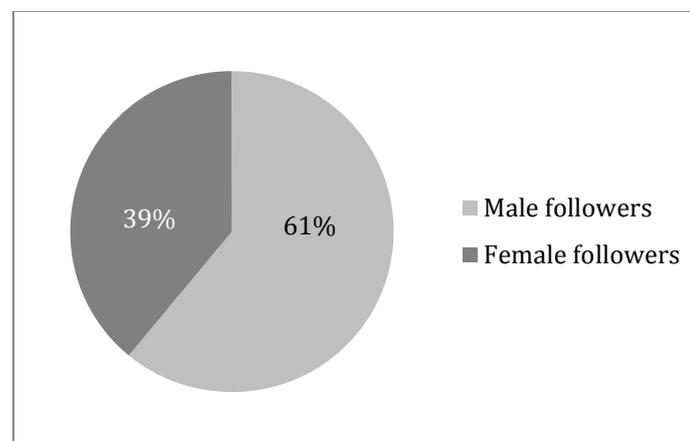


Figure 4. The demographic structure of TOS followers on Twitter by gender

Source: Tourist Organization of Serbia

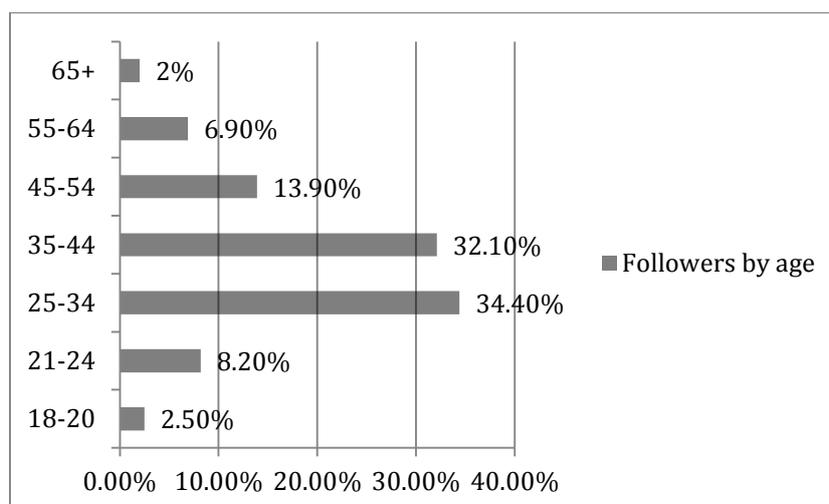


Figure 5. The demographic structure of TOS followers on Twitter by age

Source: Tourist Organization of Serbia

Unlike other female-dominated TOS accounts, on Twitter, these are men with 61%. The most dominant audience is 25-34. (Figure 4 and Figure 5). When it comes to the most successful tweets, in the period from 2015 to the present, it is a tweet with the video Serbia: “The place to be”, with which, in 2017, TOS presented the beauties of Serbia on BBC world television and Eurosport.

Analysis of Instagram profile of Tourist Organization of Serbia

The Instagram profile of the Tourist Organization of Serbia has more than 51 thousand followers. The most dominant audience is 25-34. The demographic structure of TOS's followers on Instagram shows that the women are in the majority (Figure 6 and Figure 7). The page name is Serbia Travel and the username is @serbiatourism. The profile description states that this is the official profile of the Serbian Tourism Organization, as well as a sentence stating that if you use #SeeSerbia or #VideoSerbia you give TOS permission to share your content on your own page. Both in English. The website included in the page description is <http://serbia-the-place-to-be.serbia.travel/>.

The profile is in business form. The account title bar above the gallery contains shortcuts to phone number, email address, and location. The account is in the category Government organization and is updated daily. There are two methods of updating: User Generated Content (UGC); and Content from the Tourist Organization of Serbia database. As a way of collecting content from users, the above mentioned hashtags are used to the greatest extent, as well as tags, geolocations and also online tools. Photos are posted without any delusions. The descriptions are bilingual with text in Serbian and English. The descriptions are enriched with hashtags, but not so much to stifle the main message. Each photo contains geolocation. TOS takes full advantage of this social network. Instagram Stories are occasionally created, some of which are featured on the profile. TOS has on several occasions on this network conducted live broadcasts from different destinations in Serbia, such as Vrnjacka Banja, Cacak, Nis, Belgrade. IGTV is also active, with two videos so far.

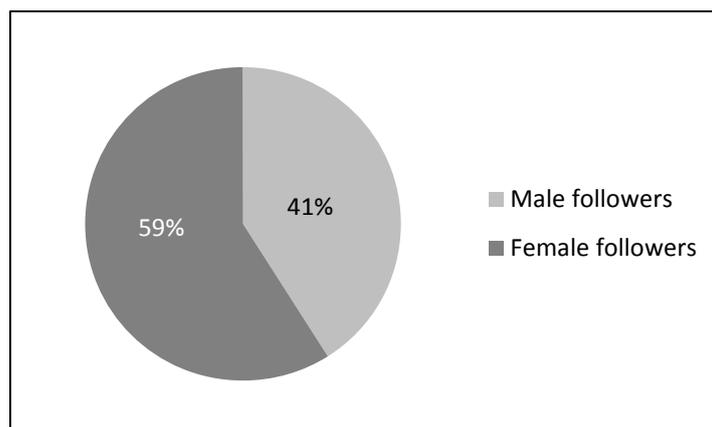


Figure 6. The demographic structure of TOS's followers on Instagram by gender

Source: Tourist Organization of Serbia

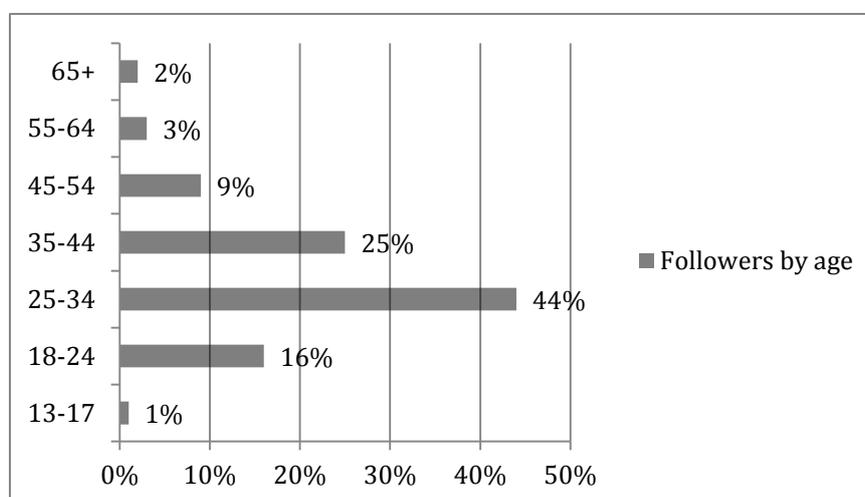


Figure 7. The demographic structure of TOS's followers on Instagram by age

Source: Tourist Organization of Serbia

Analysis of Youtube channel of Tourist Organization of Serbia

YouTube channel of the Serbian Tourism Organization has been subscribed by 6,596 users. The total number of videos posted on this channel is 168, with a total of 7,183,797 views. There is no certain dynamic for video publishing, since it depends on the production. All videos on this YouTube channel are the property of TOS, which means that on this social network the Tourist Organization of Serbia relies only on its own content, no user-generated content. The channel is organized into 9 Playlists, but not all videos are included. Videos can be divided into different series. In addition to the video series, there are also individual videos from different campaigns. The videos with the most views on this channel are: *The Danube in Serbia: 588 Impressions* with 1.8 million views; *Serbia - One journey, million impressions* with 625,538 views; *Serbia – The land of new beginnings* with 486,197 views.

The Tourist Organization of Serbia also advertises itself on this social network. The most dominant format used is the skippable and non-skippable video ad.

Analysis of TOS account on Weibo

The China Market is one of the most significant markets covered by the Serbian Tourism Organization. According to TOS statistics, the number of Chinese tourists in Serbia increased by as much as 181% in 2017, while during the first 6 months of 2018, the number of Chinese tourists increased by 97%. The Tourism Organization of Serbia, taking into account the results that Serbia's tourism has achieved when it comes to the influx of tourists from China, as well as the fact that China has banned the use of the world's most dominant social networks, has found through Weibo a way to bring Chinese tourists closer to Serbia's tourist offer online. This site is administered from China, that is, by a partner PR agency in charge of promoting Serbia in the Chinese market. The site is updated daily. The most dominant formats are photos and videos. What is particularly interesting is the fact that this site also makes extensive use of user-generated content. This fact also indicates the great interest of Chinese tourists in European destinations, and therefore Serbia. Also, this site uses celebrities from Serbia known to the Chinese public in order to bring Serbia closer to Chinese tourists, so the site can find posts related to trophies that Novak Djokovic wins, music by Goran Bregovic, Bata Zivojinovic, etc.

CONCLUSION

The use of social networks in tourism is increasingly justified because of high targeting - easy to reach, and the promotion is tailored to market segmentation; Measurability - any effort can be measured, and the result of the activity can be seen. Statistics can provide "tons of information", it's up to the company to analyze and use them regularly; Accessibility and low prices - the use of social networks is generally completely free. In order to increase the effects of its business appearance, the company can also use various methods of paid promotion, which, in comparison with other media, is far cheaper and accessible to everyone.

Many travelers "consult" social networks when planning a trip to find destinations, benefits, tips, and reviews from other travelers, they are also very present and influential during the tourists' stay in a particular destination.

In order to uniquely implement tourism information and propaganda activities, integrate Serbia's tourism space into European tourism itineraries and strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of tourism development, TOS is present on all major social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Weibo). TOS profiles on social networks publish information, news, photos and other promotional materials, answer questions of users interested in Serbia's tourism offer, organize sweepstakes and publish competitions related to building an image and positioning Serbia's tourist offer on the domestic and world markets. The number of TOS followers on social networks has increased dramatically as a result of the excellent results that TOS sites achieve, which is the result of a long-term strategic appearance on social networks that results in a large interaction of users with published content.

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