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Current State and Perspectives of Twitter usage in Tourism

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Abstract

Twitter, as the most popular microblog has unquestionable viral impact. It presents what's going on in the world by users posts and reposts and it's became more than just a social network. Individuals, companies, organisations, even governments use Twitter on daily bases and get different kind of benefits from it. Tourism and hospitality sector use it for market positioning, branding, and as an information exchange system. Role of the social networks in tourism has been widely and thoroughly discussed in literature, although this paper narrows the area of interest and puts focus on Twitter. It represents systematic and comprehensive content analysis of 61 articles from 2009-2018. As number of research publications tripled in last two years, we represent how the role of Twitter in tourism developed from marketing tool to business planning and tourist movement predicting source for data mining and other most prominent methods. Now days, Twitter became central database of e-WOM. This paper brings value for both academy and business, as it shows newest findings and research trends, it also shows useful strategies and implementations which can help companies develop their own business strategies.

Keywords: social media, twitter, research, tourism, data mining, e-WOM

JEL classification: O03

Introduction

Social networks, microblogs, and e-WoM became integral parts of our everyday life. Their influence is significant, both for personal aspect and business. The use of social networks and other communication technologies is leading to the new era for the global economy Trusov et al. (2009).

Tourism is one of the industries that has gained vast benefits from social networks, specifically in tourist behaviour observing, planning and developing marketing strategies Zeng et al. (2014).

Numerous studies examined the impact of social network and e-WoM on tourism. We found three literature reviews conducted in last three years which are related to this area (Leung et al., 2013; Zeng et al., 2014; Law et al., 2018) who altogether reviewed 301 papers from scientific journals, books, and other relevant sources. All three pieces of research implicate the emerging importance of social networks in

tourism. However, topics are mainly related to destination promotion and tourist behaviour on destination.

Furthermore, by reviewing the literature, we came to the conclusion that the most common social network used for researching social networks in term of tourism is Facebook. Facebook influence is by far the most investigated as the example of a social network used in a destination or for tourism planning (Bruhn et al., 2012).

As we found the gap in the literature, the primary objective of this study was to examine the different example of social media in tourism. It's important to have further review of the progress of researches on the topic, with major publication sources included. To our best knowledge, no studies about Twitter usage in tourism has been done in the past, so we conducted a comprehensive literature investigation on the topic. A secondary goal was to find trends for the usage and examine authors, contents, and implications of scientific literature. Both academic and business values have emerged from the analysis: broadening knowledge about microblogs and social networks role in tourism and hospitality and finding practical implications useful to businesses.

Theoretical background

Social networks and e-Wom in tourism and hospitality sector

The significance of social networks worldwide confirms research conducted by Statista (2018) which predicts that within a period of three years, a third of Earth's entire population will actively use it.

According to Wells (2011), the term "social networking" cannot be revised without alongside the term "social media". Social networks are considered as platforms who focuses on the relationship between people who share mutual interests, connections and activities, while social media are determined as means of communication which provides people to reach and influence others. Social networks are part of social media, and they are both parts of viral marketing (Gutiérrez, 2017).

Influence of social networking, e-WoM and microblogs for travel planning and exchanging experiences has been researched as an emerging topic. Tung et al. (2011) aim that tourists on destination and after the trip shares more than just their knowledge, they share experiences which is considered as the personal evaluation of events in whole travel cycle. They include imaginations, emotions, and feelings about destination and experience (Baym, 2015).

Munar et al. (2012) acknowledge that advice on practical implications and embodied feelings are significant in internet reviews. Therefore, social networks and other social media in tourism provide relevant benefits for decision-making, information search, and promotion of tourist destinations, products, and suppliers.

Social media in travel context is used differently worldwide. For instance, travellers from the UK use social media as the primary resource when planning their holiday (World Travel Market, 2013) and in the Asia-Pacific region, 44% of leisure travellers use social media platforms for advice and inspiration when choosing holiday destinations (eMarketer, 2013; Uşaklı et al., 2017).

According to TripAdvisor's Trip Barometer (2014), nearly 90% of travellers worldwide take into account online reviews while choosing their trip. In fact, more than half travellers are willing to change (Amaro et al., 2016).

Twitter

Twitter is one of the top ten most visited websites, and it's considered the most popular microblogging site in the world (Antoniadis et al., 2015). Philander et al.

(2016) reported that it had been widely adopted by both consumers and companies. According to Kirilenko et al. (2014), over a half billion retweets per day have been recorded. Gonçalves et al. (2011) astound with the value of Twitter data and metadata in interpreting public communication behaviours.

Deddens (2011) points out that the original purpose of Twitter was informing what people do. Nowadays, it's expanded to what's going on in the world. Updates in 140 characters which will show in the timeline of people's followers, as others will be visible at person timeline (Tenkanen, 2017).

According to Kwak et al. (2010), the prevalence of Twitter forms significant implications for the hospitality and tourism. Twitter finds itself among top three platforms by US hotels and restaurant operators (Kim et al., 2013). Twitter also can be handy for examining the characteristics and drivers of electronic word of mouth due to its viral nature.

The problem which has occurred in many industries, tourism and hospitality included is finding perspective, the cause of high variance real-time posts is very time-consuming to extract and analyse objective data and gain qualitative feedback or establish competitive benchmarks (Xiang et al., 2015). This research investigates all newest practices and methods as well as give practical implications that could be helpful.

Methodology

Methods which were used in order to conduct this paper was the systematization of searched scientific literature and comprehensive content analysis. Web of Science was the platform used for all database searches in which were included following indexes: SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, BKCI-S, BKCI-SSH, ESCI, CCR-EXPANDED, IC. The research was made in April 2018.

Primarily, "social media" and "tourism" were key words used for the database search. 686 results were given from assorted fields such as hospitality leisure sports tourism, management, business, computer science and sociology. Few extensive and exploratory literature reviews were found, such as Leung's et al. (2013) "Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality: A Literature Review" published in *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* and Zeng's et al. (2014) "What do we know about social media in tourism? A review" published in *Tourism Management Perspectives*.

Next step was the decision to narrow the field down in order to explore the area without prior researches. Refined search was also made in Web of Science core collection with the same indexes listed above. Now the key words were "twitter" and "tourism". The logical operator "and" was used in a search in order to include both keywords. 66 results were found on which further investigation was made.

The research included all document types listed, most of them were articles (37), there were 27 proceedings papers, 2 reviews, and one book chapter.

Papers were conducted from authors worldwide: the country with most authors is USA (10 papers) which is understandable because of Silicon Valley and the fact that the USA is world's leader in innovation implementing. Seven articles were made in Spain, six pieces of research were from Italy, five from England and all other countries have less than five researches made. Most of the researches were made in English, 63 of them, only two was in Spanish and one in Portuguese.

Time span

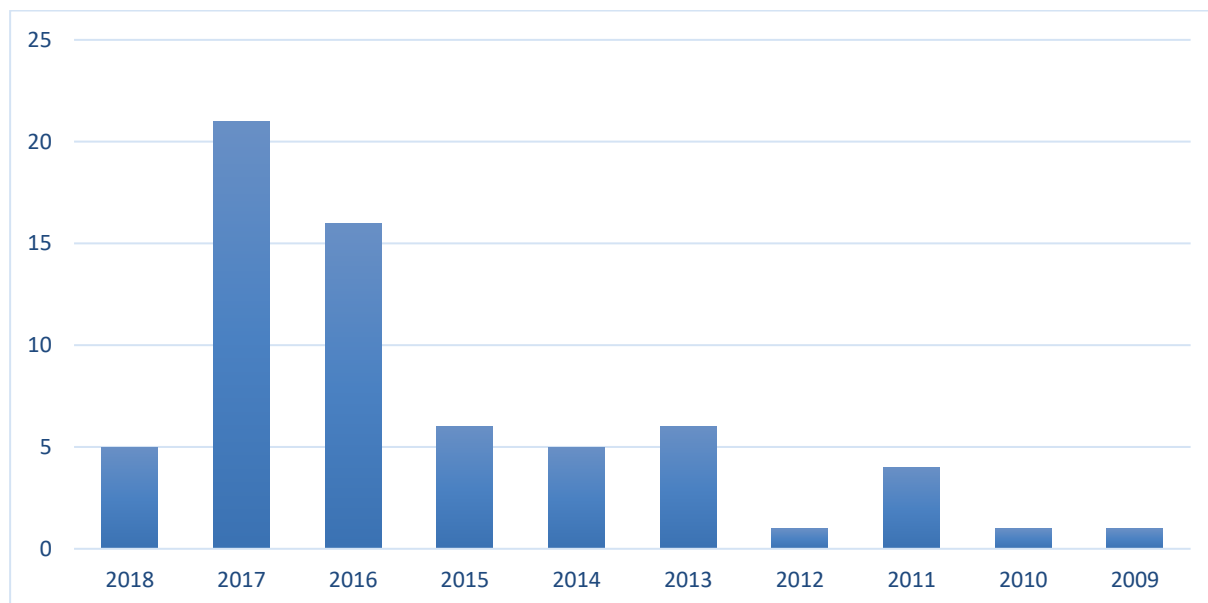
Figure 1 presents the numbers of papers published using keywords tourism and Twitter. The first research on the topic made was published in 2009. Which suggest that the issue is relatively recent. It was paper made by Badawy (2009) with the title: "Technology management simply defined: A Tweet plus two characters." Purpose of this article was to set the newest technologies at the time, Twitter in this case from a management perspective, which additionally included hospitality management and tourism. Conceptualization of the field management of technology was essential for undertaking meaningful research. 2010 was published one article as well, made by Drews et al. (2010) and it referred to online travel planning for disabled people using user-generated content from Twitter.

Although, number of researches before the last three years was scare. Scope became widely discussed since 2016, where 16 papers were made. The positive trend continued in 2017 with 21 paper conducted, and in 2018, 5 articles were published until April.

This fact substantiates growing significance role of Twitter in the tourism and hospitality sector and additionally expanding it from marketing and promotion to decision-making and strategy.

Figure 1

Number of papers published using keywords tourism and Twitter

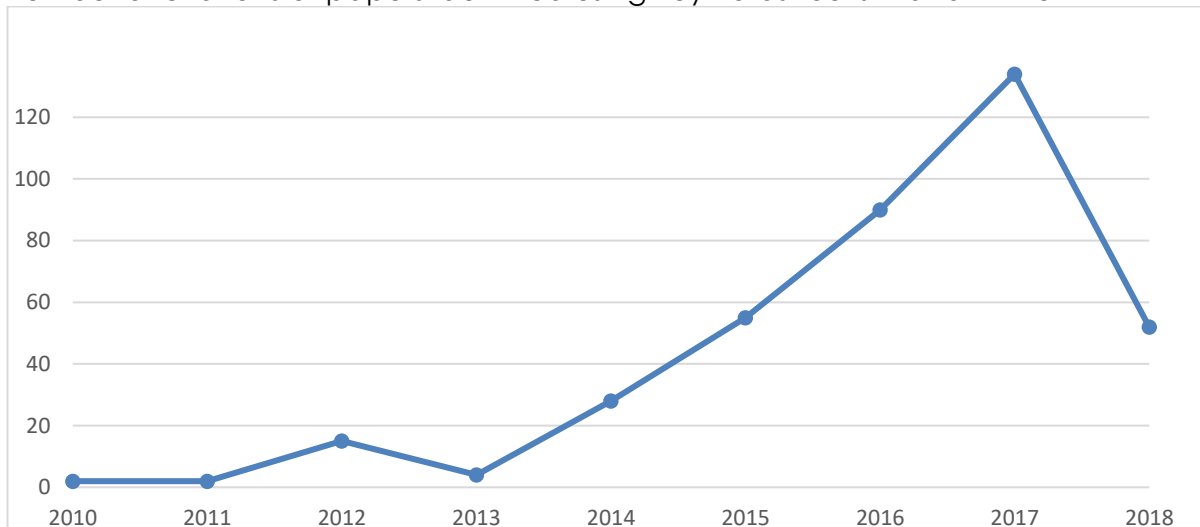


Source: Authors' work based on the data found on Web of science

Figure 2 presents number of citations that publications found using keywords tourism and Twitter generated over time. Results of the citation statistics confirm the emerging significance of the role of Twitter in tourism. There were 373 citations altogether with the noticeable increase in last few years as seen in Figure 2. The number of citation in the last two years raised about 100% with 90 citations in 2016 and 134 in 2017. Paper with most citations is paper made by Hays et al. (2013): "Social media as a destination marketing tool: its use by national tourism organisations" with 123 citations.

Figure 2

Number of citations of papers identified using keywords tourism and Twitter



Source: Authors' work based on the data found on Web of Science

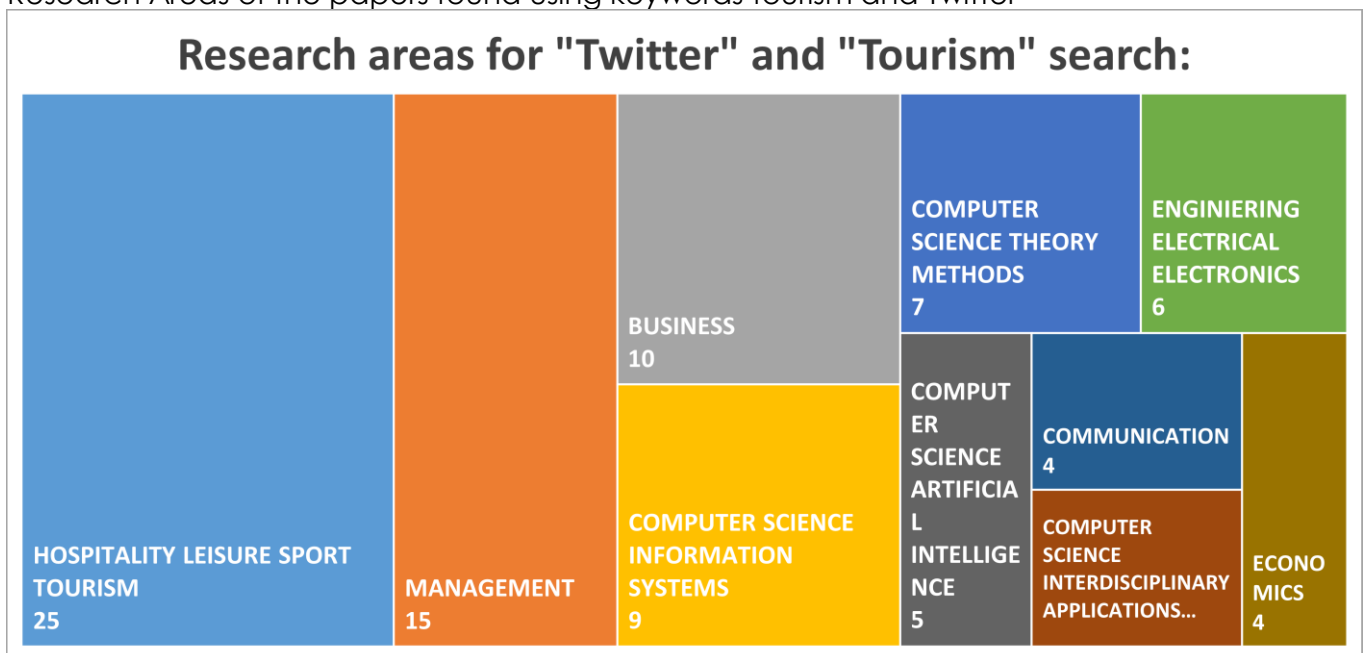
Research areas

Figure 3 presents the research areas of the papers found using keywords 'tourism' and 'Twitter'. Most of the database search results were included in the hospitality leisure tourism ranking, which is about 1/3 of all researches on the given topic.

Furthermore, about 25 researches were related to the computer science theme. Management was following area with 15 scientific papers, included, Business with 10. In the latest articles, Economics occurred as the research area, which proves the fact that the role of social media and Twitter is expanding and is producing benefits both for academic and business advancement.

Figure 3

Research Areas of the papers found using keywords 'tourism' and 'Twitter'



Source: Authors' work based on the data found on Web of Science

Results

After database search results review, content analysis was made. Articles were divided into several groups by their essence and appliance. Categories in which researches was divided were general approach, Modern technologies, Countries and Destinations and Case studies.

Group "General approach" consist of Literature reviews and papers, which were describing the role of Twitter in tourism and hospitality management. This category includes already mentioned articles from 2009 and 2010, along with the literature reviews from 2013 and 2014. Older articles describe the influence of Twitter in tourism as marketing developer, as more recent literature, a more extensive array of roles has been presented.

In "Modern technology" group, all articles, which are related to the newest technologies and techniques, are selected. This category contains 7 papers, which are linking the role of Twitter to the concept of Smart tourism, which is a very prominent subject of interest. Articles, which are related to the *big data* and *electronic word of mouth (e-Wom)*, are included as a significant factor in developing more advanced tourism strategies and digitalization. For instance, one of the newest articles in the field produced by Salas-Olmedo et al. (2018) distinguish the importance of Twitter as one of the critical sources for analysing the presence of tourists in cities. This category is the most significant one because it discovers and presents the wideness and the possibilities of implementation role of Twitter in hospitality management and tourism.

Group "Countries and Destinations" involve all the articles related to the specific country, government or destination. They demonstrate how Twitter can promote particular destination or even a whole country. Forceful research has been done on this topic in 2017 by Williams et al. (2017), where authors describe how European Union advantage social media for promotion and concluded with the recommendation of utilization for each social media. For Twitter, it was used as the marketing tool rather than a customer service tool.

Finally, group "Case studies" is consisted of all case studies related to the topic. There were made numerous studies in different fields. The case studies about sports events such as Sochi and Fifa case studies demonstrate the usage of Twitter and the significance of E-WoM on globally involved events (Thomaz et al., 2017.). A case about Fifa made in 2014 is the first article, which includes social media mining term into the tourism domain. In addition, Williams et al. (2015) propose the case study about festivals in which authors compare how different kinds of social media effect on the popularity of theme park. Additional case studies about hotel industry and their usage of social networks for promotion and personalised offering were also identified.

Conclusion

Due to the extensive literature review of 66 scientific papers, both practical and academic implications emerged from the analyses. From 2009 when first paper on the topic was published, to 2018. The role of Twitter as the most popular blog, in tourism and hospitality industry evolved, from simple marketing context as mentioned in early work to comprehensive and sophisticated tool, which is significant for developing strategic plans for companies, destinations, even for countries.

Furthermore, the emerging importance of the topic is confirmed by disclosing the number of papers and trends in the last two years as well as affected research fields,

which is spreading. This study was exploratory and interpretative in nature, and it thoroughly demonstrates the strategic importance of Twitter for tourism competitiveness, which implicates interesting topics for further investigations. As no such review was found, the paper contributes academia by identifying and filling some research voids as well as it contributes business as providing practical implications, connecting Twitters to some prominent technologies and trends such as e-Wom, big data, and smart cities and disclosing future directions.

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