Social Media in Sustainable Tourism Recovery

Subjects: Agricultural Economics & Policy
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The way tourists use SM during and after their trip differs by generation and gender what could be used in promoting responsible behaviour for sustainable tourism. Differences between generations can be observed in behaviours such as ongoing planning the trip, obtaining information about the place to stay, keeping a photo album for friends, and writing reviews. Moreover, more often than men, women use SM to obtain information about the place of stay and share their impressions of the trip by sending MMS or emails. Tracking tourists' travel behaviour on social media will allow city managers to gather information and respond to their needs and expectations and ensure effective urban management and city promotion.

Keywords: social media ; SM ; sustainable tourism ; urban management ; smart tourism ; tourism recovery

1. Using Social Media to Restore Tourism Sustainably

Tourism is an integral component of urban policy, which is understood as an organised and purposeful activity of local authorities, established and carried out in cooperation with other entities pursuing their objectives and meeting their needs in the city area. Ensuring both a high quality of life for residents and a high quality of stay for visitors is an overarching objective of local, sustainable development strategies [1]. Therefore, it is necessary to implement solutions in the area of sustainable development that will help achieve this goal.

In August 2015, 193 UN (United Nations) member states reached a compromise on the final document of the new agenda, “Transforming our world: Agenda for Sustainable Development—2030”, which contains 17 goals and 169 tasks. Sustainable development requires action on many levels and entails the implementation of regulations in particular areas [2]. Achieving sustainable development goals requires ensuring the coherence of three key elements—economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection—which are important for achieving the well-being of individuals and entire societies [3]. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. [4]

There is a trend of “Revenge Tourism” among tourists due to the limited travel opportunities over the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic [4][5][6][7][8]. Research indicates that the most anticipated activity of tourists after the lifting of restrictions related to the pandemic is the possibility of travel and spontaneous trips [9]. This situation may change the game’s rules in tourism and is currently under debate regarding the proper role of tourism [9]. On the one hand, it is inferred that the current situation should be an opportunity to reconsider the transformation of the global tourism system more aligned with sustainable development goals [10]. On the other hand, proponents of a rapid revival of the tourism industry oppose broader efforts to reform tourism to be more ethical, responsible and sustainable [9]. Furthermore, the opinions of tourists are also worth noting. Research indicates that tourists' decisions to travel abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic are influenced by tourism companies' engagement with communities, the country's response to the outbreak, and prevention efforts related to COVID-19 [11]. Thus, the challenge is increasing to provide the right conditions for tourism fulfilment, as well as to study the behaviour of tourists to enable a sustainable return to tourism. Tourists, encouraged by visiting destinations that are open to travellers, may visit them in crowds, so it is essential to prepare for this tourism boom by carrying out activities that will enable efficient tourism management.

The current situation creates an opportunity to reconsider the transformation of the global tourism system that is more aligned with sustainable development goals [10]. The literature emphasises the relevance of implementing sustainable development principles in tourism [12]. Therefore, the ongoing discussion is an opportunity to consider diverse ways to transform tourism [11]. Several stakeholders are involved in tourism activities, each expecting individual benefits. Regions are interested in obtaining standardised and high-quality tourism data, which enable them to make coordinated decisions between different management entities, thus improving the articulation of tourism products and the management of information and impacts [13]. In turn, tourists expect to relax in safe conditions, which is a challenge for urban
The development of Industry 4.0 allows organisations to use many innovative technologies, which affects the development of society 5.0 [14]. The use of AI, Big Data, or the Internet in tourism is becoming more and more common. Cities are implementing new technologies in urban planning and management, which enable them to gather information from various sources and then use it to manage the city. They are described as sustainable, creative, smart, eco, green, sensitive, participatory, etc. [15]. Smart cities can be defined as cities that use innovative technologies to achieve resource optimisation, effective and fair governance, sustainability, and quality of life [16].

Digital technologies, sensors and hardware devices, software and big data—the core components of smart city systems—provide ways to understand and manage increasingly complex systems. These solutions are used in various types of applications, including intelligent transportation systems, cognitive assistance, health and social services [17][18]. Tourism regions are interested in implementing modern solutions, which enables them to be smart tourism [19][20]. Thus, they promote their offer to customers who are changing their behavioural patterns and massively use digital technologies [21]. In turn, tourism managers receive a large amount of data about consumers, have the opportunity to better profile tourists, and customise the tourist experience, which results in a better market offer [22]. In addition, user-generated content (UGC) can be used by policymakers and destination managers trying to accomplish better urban management especially, the distribution of tourists over the entire [23]. The need to use IT solutions in tourism is increasingly emphasised [19]. Among them, social media are extremely popular, which are increasingly used to collect and gather information provided by potential and current customers of tourism services [24][25]. This is related to the large expansion of the use of social media. For example, Poles spend on average 1 h 59 min per day using social media, most often on YouTube channels (25.9 million), while the second most popular site is Facebook (17 million), [26]. Social media in tourism are used to promote places [27][28] to develop effective communication strategies [29], to create a clear image of the travel destination chosen by tourists [30][31], and to analyse tourists’ moods (Tourist Sentiment Analysis) [32].

Information presented in social media without barriers is distributed around the world. Research has been conducted by retrieving public comments from an online comment board which made it possible to identify problems in urban management [33].

Therefore, a tourist's experience of visiting a remote corner of the world can be a valuable source of information for other inhabitants of the globe. Tourism companies that enhance social opportunities for indigenous peoples can enhance the potential of online and social media to enable indigenous communities to engage in the global arena and direct the marketing of their culture without intermediaries [34]. Moreover, through social media, a selected image of a tourist region can be created through elements that build specific associations in tourists [35].

How important is the role of social media in sustainable smart cities is shown by the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic? In February 2020, social media provided information for Chinese residents to be careful to maintain social distance from tourists coming from Hubei province, where coronavirus was detected [36]. Additionally, the need to keep the online community alive during the pandemic is emphasised in order to try to stay in the minds of consumers when it comes to meeting their travel needs once the crisis is over [37]. That indicates that obtaining information from tourists is an important task to be carried out in order to manage the city efficiently.

When a tourism destination gets smarter, the tourists' needs and demands are expected to be fulfilled more efficiently to create a better tourist experience [20]. This indicates that social media is an important channel of communication about tourist behaviour/experience. Through AI-enabled social media, well-targeted, personalised travel options can be offered that relate to a person’s lifestyle. Already, social media is being used during the reinstatement of tourism under new rules. Tourists are encouraged to share their travel stories by adding the hashtag “#TogetherInTravel” [38].

In addition, as the results of the study indicate [36], active participation in social media serves as a distraction in mitigating the negative effect of psychological stress caused by travel anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this indicates that the reasons are varied for using social media when sharing the travel experience.

## 2. Generational and Gender Differences in Sharing Tourism Experiences through Social Media

One of the activities that can contribute to urban management is the use of community-based tourism (CBT). Increasingly, community-based tourism activities are implemented, which allow local communities to take initiatives to encourage tourists to get involved in their communities and cultural events. Building their inter-relationships can help the local
community to solve their problems, share knowledge and integrate. By identifying them, marketing and management strategies can be implemented in terms of sustainable community-based tourism. Social media can be used to connect tourists with the local community. In the current situation, the need to maintain a relationship with this online community is emphasised, which can also provide a forum to co-create new destination products and services.

Tourists may use social media during different stages of their trip (e.g., before, during, and after their trip (pre-trip phase, on-site phase, post-trip phase)), when they share their impressions and experiences. The travel experience can be defined as, “An individual’s subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities which begin before (i.e., planning and preparation), during (i.e., at the destination), and after the trip (i.e., recollection).” When and to what extent tourists will use social media depends on many factors and motivations.

As studies indicate, the level of e-literacy of users and their use of social media is significantly influenced by income, nationality and education. Above all, however, the greatest differences in the use of social media in tourism can be seen according to the age, and gender of users. Since tourists are not demographically and psychologically homogeneous, the need for research to compare different personal factors of tourists is also emphasised. It is also important to note that social media users range from regular tourists to professional social media users, travel bloggers, and content creators.

The gender of tourists can easily influence their ratings, perceptions and attitudes about social media content. According to a study, women use social networks to build relationships while men use them for reporting. In addition, indicated that men use the Internet for recreation and entertainment while women use it for interpersonal communication and educational assistance. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that men and women's motivations for using social media are different. Furthermore, in a study conducted on social media, the motivations for using social media, the time spent on it, and the importance attached to the content may differ by gender. In addition, women are more likely than men to visit travel agencies’ websites and read reviews from other visitors for details. In addition, it has been observed that women can make decisions more easily through the opinions of other visitors. Consequently, women use social media for detailed information.

Tourists planning a trip have different expectations, requirements or preferences regarding the purpose, place, and time of spending their holiday. These differences primarily depend on the age they are. Currently, literature studies focus on four generations: Baby Boomers (born between 1945 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1994), and Generation Z (born after 1995). Each generation is conditioned by different economic, business, or political factors. At the same time, in the literature, this division is not unambiguous and varies from country to country.

Baby Boomers (BB) are born between 1945 and 1964, the so-called baby boom and economic boom generation. Because most of this generation are retirees, they are increasingly frequent and willing to vacation and travel in different parts of the world. The growing mobility of this generation is primarily related to their established social position, financial capabilities, and having more free time. According to the annual survey of AARP (the American Association of Retired Persons), the American Baby Boomer is full of optimism and, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, does not give up his dreams of seeing the world. According to Levy (2021), in his research, just over half of Boomers (54%) plan to travel in 2021 and are actively selecting destinations, booking accommodations, and reviewing COVID-19 security protocols. Among those who wish to travel, most state that they are “hopeful” and “excited” about the prospect. However, for nearly half of the Baby Boomers surveyed, the biggest obstacle to travel is concern about their health. The Levy (2021) survey also found that 41% of boomers believe it is dangerous to travel during a pandemic, and 47% who intend to travel will only do so if a vaccine is available. The majority (74%) of them also said that travel restrictions by COVID-19 have prevented or are preventing them from taking all the trips they would like to take in 2021. However, most of those (57%) who will not be going anywhere in 2021 are setting aside money for future travel. Still, the Baby Boomers are the generation that expects to spend the most on travel in 2021, averaging $669, while Generation X travellers expect to spend about $5000 and Millennials $4000. According to AARP, 85% of Generation BB travellers use the Internet to plan their trips. BBs take their smartphone with them when they go on a trip; 84% of BBs use it for international travel while 94% use it for domestic travel. The BB Generation uses smartphones primarily to communicate, take pictures, use maps, or find places to eat and do various activities. Most Boomers (80%) save their vacation memories and share them through digital methods such as sending photos via MMS (44%) and Facebook posts (32%). On vacation, Baby Boomers are more likely to seek out quiet, peaceful places where they can enjoy native foods, traditions, and entertainment. The main motivators of the Baby Boomers generation in choosing holidays are having fun

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and enjoying the trip, relieving stress and tension, relaxation, the need for change and novelty, as well as the attractiveness of the physical environment and taking care of better health. 

Generation X are those born between 1965 and 1980, now 41–56 years old, who grew up in Poland and entered adult life during economic restructuring and political changes. This generation highly values family and close friends, so they plan trips together with family and children or friends (54%). They are willing to look for new places where they can learn about the culture and traditions of the local community. They particularly value healthy eating. According to a study by Expedia Group Media Solutions, as many as 71% of people from this generation like to discover new places off the beaten track and look for local recommendations, while 70% visit museums, historical sites and art and culture. Although people of this generation were born in the analogue era, they are perfectly familiar with the modern digital world and modern technologies, which is why they willingly use the Internet while planning and booking their trips.

The phenomenon that shaped Generation Y, also called Millennials, was globalisation, which resulted in the blurring of barriers between countries, merging of cultures, increasing accessibility to products and services from all over the world. Millennials are now between 27 and 40 years old. This generation is very mobile; they often travel, move from one place to another and have friends and acquaintances all over the world. Representatives of Generation Y travel more than people from Baby Boomers or Generation X. They visit more destinations, spend more while travelling and are hungry for intense experiences. According to a study conducted in Poland by Kowalczyk A., this generation rarely travels alone (less than 7%); they instead choose the company of friends (70%) or family (58%). According to research, Millennials make the largest number of trips per year. They are frequent but undecided travellers who enjoy experiencing and discovering nature, often with young children in their arms. Millennials like variety, so some like adventurous and unique experiences, while others want to relax on the beach, taste the local cuisine. Generation Y tourists tend to shy away from mass tourism as they are more independent in their travel planning and are more concerned about protecting the environment. Compared to Baby Boomers and Generation X, Generation Y plan their trips and book their accommodation through dedicated websites or social media, such as TripAdvisor.

Generation Z are those born between 1995 and 2010, and although they share many of the same characteristics as Millennials, some of their characteristics are more visible, and in many ways, they are very different. Generation Z is a generation very open to the world, and all technological innovations make it easier for them to explore new places. The main form of communication for them is social media. People from Generation Z are very open to the world and willing to travel. However, they often lack financial resources, as they are not yet financially independent. For this reason, domestic holidays with family or friends dominate in this group. A study conducted by Expedia Group Media Solutions in 11 different countries in 2018 showed that representatives of Generation Z most often travel to relax (54%), visit interesting places (44%), visit family (42%). Furthermore, 84% of Generation Z believe that social media plays an important role when travelling (Generation Y 77%), and more than 50% use platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube when planning and during their trips.

There are numerous studies in the literature on the use of social media sustainable tourism. However, the results of the study indicate that smart cities are failing to capitalise on possibilities offered by social media. The literature emphasises that social media and smart tourism are the themes with the greatest potential, while sustainable cities, changes in tourist behaviour are underdeveloped streams with enormous relevance and growth in the new normal reality after COVID-19. However, there is a lack of work that addresses this topic, particularly across generations. The existing works are mostly conducted among the younger generation, hence there is a research gap in this area.

Although social media is rapidly being adopted by seniors, there are very common concerns about the leakage of private data and the risks associated with sharing information.

Such risks are partly due to the fact that seniors (knowingly or unknowingly) share private information that others can abuse. They frequently share their posts publicly because they are unaware of the appropriate settings for their profiles. Moreover, as research on older users’ use of Facebook shows, they are more likely to share public information when their friends do the same. On the other hand, they are more likely to keep their Facebook photos private if more of their friends do the same. Lack of awareness about privacy settings on social media platforms also affects younger users, as confirmed by a study conducted by Adjie et al. However, it is also the case that once users choose the right access control settings to protect their privacy, they rarely change them afterwards. Changes in users’ lives and relationships, as well as in the social media platforms themselves, may then result in discrepancies between the active privacy setting of the entry and the desired setting. Obviously, with the increasing popularity of social networks, research interests in methods to protect the privacy of individuals who participate in them have increased. Most research efforts are devoted to identifying and formalising privacy violations, or anonymising network data, or...
developing privacy settings strategies}. When analysing different aspects of data privacy by gender, often the research results are contradictory. For example, in studies by [11,16], women are more vulnerable to privacy risks because they are less likely than men to be concerned about the misuse of their personal information. In contrast, survey results of [19] indicated that women were more concerned about information privacy than men. Thus, there is a significant research gap in identifying generational or gender differences in social media privacy awareness during travel use.

References


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