

Technology, marketing and tourism education: The challenges of integrating social media into the curricula

Tecnologia, marketing e **formação em Turismo**: Os desafios da **integração dos social media nos currículos**

ANA BALULA * [balula@ua.pt]

ALEXANDRA CORREIA ** [acorreia@estg.ipv.pt]

SANDRA VASCONCELOS *** [sandra.vasconcelos@estg.ipv.pt]

Keywords | Tourism education, marketing, social networks

Objectives | Taking a cue from the ongoing debate about the current role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), what is being taught at these institutions and whether that meets the market's needs, the main goal of this study is to collect and analyze evidence as to the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within tourism marketing education and how it is being integrated into the curricula, offering a comprehensive review of recently published research on the subject. Focusing on the use of social media and based on experiences from the field, the authors also outline and discuss practical examples of how these changes are taking place.

Methodology | The methodology used was based on a literature review focusing on recent peer-reviewed, open-source research available in academic databases, on the occupational profiles for tourism and the use of ICT and social networks within marketing tourism education. After reflecting on these contributions, the authors set out to outline key concepts and practical examples from the field, also reflecting on an agenda for future research.

Main Results and Contributions | Over the last decade the educational offer in tourism has considerably increased and become more diversified and flexible. This expansion, which mirrors the industry's growth, also derives from a variety of other factors, including technological development – not only in

* **Ph.D. in Administrative Sciences** from the School of Economics and Management at the University of Minho in Braga. **Assistant Professor** at the School of Public Management, Communication and Tourism (EsACT), Polytechnic Institute of Bragança. **Associated member** of the Research Center in Political Science at the School of Economics and Management, University of Minho.

** **PhD in Tourism** from the University of Aveiro and **Associate Professor** at the same University, at the Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism (DEGEIT). **Member** of the Research Unit GOVCOPP.

*** **PhD in Tourism** from the University of Aveiro and **Associate Professor** at the same University, at the Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism (DEGEIT). **Member** of the Research Unit GOVCOPP.

what concerns mobility, but also information and communication. These changes are also having an impact on tourism education and training. Recently, there has been an escalating demand for human resources that meet the hospitality industry's requirements, as the market now requires workers to possess transversal skills, ranging from computer, to management and marketing skills.

ICT and social networks have fundamentally changed the way in which the tourism industry operates. Besides reshaping the nature of services and work within the hospitality industry, technological development is also a driving force for innovation, as it changed the way stakeholders and consumers interact and how they perceive the tourist experience. As social networking sites become the most popular internet-based technology, companies and organizations are becoming increasingly aware of their potential as marketing tools that allow them to promote different destinations and experiences in a more direct and extensive way.

However, research shows that, despite the overwhelming effects these platforms are having, tourism stakeholders still struggle to take full advantage of social networks. The data also suggests that, even though tourism students are exposed to ICT and social networks in marketing in their curriculum, they need more specific exposure to these technologies within their courses. New, enhanced curricula are necessary to keep students informed of current developments and changes. In addition, the process of curricula review should rely on industry partnerships and their input.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find examples of how tourism courses are incorporating social media into their programs, namely in marketing courses. Besides supporting communication and information dissemination, as well as teaching and learning activities, there are several projects based on e-tourism and social networks' influence on tourists' decision-making processes.

Limitations | Even though it is possible to find different examples of how social media is being integrated into tourism marketing education, this is still an emerging research area. The fact that the process of using social networks in this setting is still at an early stage of development and the lack of studies is a limitation to this review.

Conclusions | As education becomes increasingly intertwined with economy, it should also take the industry's and market's needs into consideration, helping students become competitive and innovative. For this reason, more HEI are gradually following a more interdisciplinary approach to their tourism courses. This review suggests it is crucial to encourage comprehensive research into both the influence and impact of social media as part of tourism marketing strategies and as critical part of educational development.

References |

- Ashari, H., Heidari, M., & Pavaresh, S. (2014). Improving SMTEs business performance through strategic use of information and communication technology: ICT and tourism challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Accounting, Finance and Management Sciences*, 4(3), 1-20.
- Huang, Y. C., Backman, S. J., Backman, K. F., & Moore, D. (2013). Exploring user acceptance of 3D virtual worlds in travel and tourism marketing. *Tourism Management*, 36, 490-501.
- Sigala, M., Christou, E., & Gretzel, U. (Eds.). (2012). *Social media in travel, tourism and hospitality: Theory, practice and cases*. Farham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

- Werthner, H., Alzua-Sorzabal, A., Cantoni, L., Dickinger, A., Gretzel, U., Jannach, D., ... & Stangl, B. (2015). Future research issues in IT and tourism. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 15(1), 1-15.
- Xu, F., Tian, F., Buhalis, D., Weber, J., & Zhang, H. (2015). Tourists as mobile gamers: gamification for tourism marketing. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*: 33 (8) 1124-1142.