How the Mobile Technologies and ICT-s in the Tourism Sector Affect the Social Cohesion

Elton Noti[1], Enida Kume[2]

[1]*Marketing Department, Faculty of Business, University "Alexander Moisiu", Durrës, Albania*
[2]*Departament of Sociology, Faculty of Education, University "Alexander Moisiu", Durrës, Albania*

ABSTRACT *: Travel today is an activity for millions of people around the world, not only directly related to tourism purposes, but for many other reasons. The past 20 years, the transport sector was significantly upgraded by providing convenience, speed and more facilities, in most cases with relatively low cost. Also, the tourism sector is heavily influenced by information technology and communication (ICT-s) as one of the tools that providers of tourism services are mainly used for marketing and sales purposes. One of the very important effects of tourism is to bring positive results in the social cohesion of the countries where is developed. But the phenomenon that is noticed nowadays is that people from different social groups like young people, elderly and people with disabilities are using ICT massively for planning their holidays, for being informed about the destination where they want to go, for bookings, reservations, payments etc. This article aims to show that the mobile technology and innovations in ICT-s in the tourism sector have positive effects on the social cohesion and the industry itself. Application producers for mobile equipments are providing innovative and practical services which have often very logical prices, attracting millions of users.*
KEYWORDS: *ICT, mobile technology, marketing, tourism, innovations, social cohesion*

I.   INTRODUCTION

International tourism arrivals grew by 4,3 % in the first eight months of 2015, fuelled by strong results in Europe which is the world's most visited regional destination. It recorded a robust of 5% increase in international tourist arrivals, the highest across all regions and a notable result for a rather mature region . [1]
The tourism industry is a good example of cooperation in network, where both parties, either by the customer, or by tourism service providers need to exchange information, in order to offer/ purchased a final product. The Internet enables travelers to get information online in real time, unlimited updated before traveling abroad, and obviously this affects the information obtained in their decision to visit or not a specific destination [2]. The Internet has given the public a general approach on instruments such as bookings/reservations used by industry professionals and by different social groups. Mobile applications may soon transform all the tourism services, providing instant and appropriate responses to the needs of passengers. Apart from accommodation bookings at accommodation units, air flight tickets, etc, mobile applications currently lie in all services related to transport, travel agencies, hotels and many cultural, historical or environmental information for travelers. [3]
A tourism Website designed appropriately can significantly facilitate a traveler, helping to ensure that he is making the right choice and have an enjoyable experience. The customer is the main purpose of tourism services. Tourists are benefiting too much from internet options offered by smart phones that help them in the process of gathering information, reading the comments on various tourist services, ticketing etc. Here we can mention that due to the low cost internet connections too many rural and poor societies are able nowadays to communicate and use mobile devices, for different reasons such as applying for jobs, communication easily with other people etc.
Electronic marketing strategies have been extensively used and the pressure on businesses to invest more in the production of applications at the tourism services has been increased. This trend followed by the number of users of mobile devices that also has been increased, so and the interest for evaluating mobile technologies is increasing. Today one of the most useful devices and multifunctional mobile phones are the so-called smart phones. The definition is generally used to describe any mobile phone that combines sophisticated communications technology used to access the Internet and the options offered to download various applications. The latest generation was introduced by Apple, with its well-known trademark iPhone. Since then, a wide range of smart phones more competitive brands are using these technologies. Desktop computers are suitable for research, planning and booking holidays, but do not offer easy portability and flexibility [4].
Either the companies or the consumers recognize that the Internet can be considered as an effective tool for disseminating information. From a marketing perspective, the Internet is not another marketing tool, but it can be a strategic tool to help companies increase customer satisfaction, to hold them and ensure consumer loyalty. Therefore, Internet technology is essential in customer relationship management for e - businesses.

When people are on vacation or on a business trip can use their smart phones or tablet portable minicomputers to find and share information about the destination they visit. World Travel Monitor found that 40% of international passengers traveling with a smart phone have access to Internet, e-mail and other functions. Relating the smart phone users, 40% use it to get information on destinations and 26% of passengers for reasons of relaxation and entertainment, while 34% of business travelers use them to change bookings and travel. Only a third of international travelers use their smart phones to access social networks using Web 2.0 technology. This makes tourists often posting material such as: photos, videos, etc. on their sites or blogs to Facebook, Twitter or Flickr, while they are still in the respective destination [5].

The research questions in this paper are :

1. What is the impact that mobile technology and innovations in ICT-s have to the social cohesion?

2. How has affected the mobile technology the value of tourism services such as: costs, time of sale/purchase of services, the needs and wants etc?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 The use of mobile devices

In 2013, over 2.7 billion people use the Internet, a figure which corresponds to 39 % of the world population. Europe is the region with the highest rate of Internet penetration in the world (75 %) , followed by the Americas (61 %) . In 2013, there are almost as many mobile telephone subscribers as the world's population, with more than half in the Asia-Pacific region (3.5 billion from 6.8 billion subscriptions in total [6].
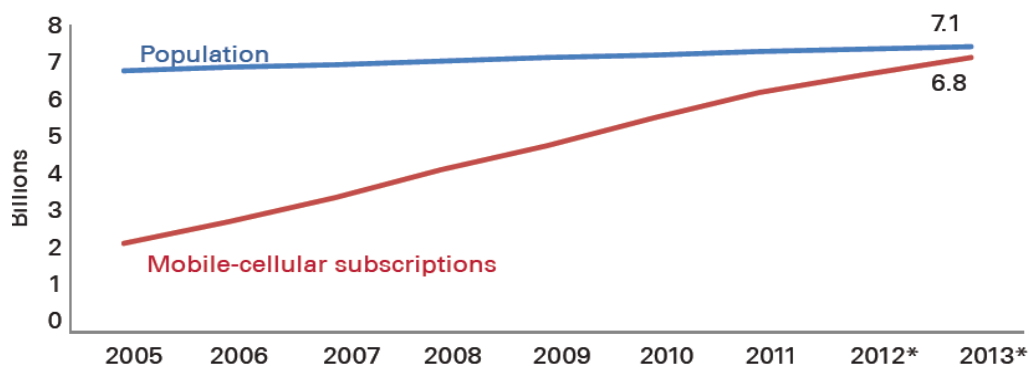
Figure 1. The number of mobile phone subscribers, compared to the total number of the world population

In emerging markets, the increasing of mobile phone users between some of the most populous nations of the world are significantly transforming the travel sector. Americans spend about 94 minutes on average with applications every day, while in China there are over 200 million handset users, which constitute 50% of the total population. According to Charles Armstrong, founder and CEO of TourWrist by the end of 2014, half of all internet traffic for the purpose of travel websites will come from mobile phones, generating $ 260 billion in bookings. He calls mobile devices like "modern" magazine, since users continue to share their personal experiences with friends and family. Also travel experts on Facebook have found that 25% of people who watch vacation photos on social media, means a catalyst for their future travel plans, of which 11% bookings for their travel to the country which they have seen the picture. Use of mobile Smartphone is now 25% for Facebook and Instagram. This is 10% more than phone calls or messages, so clearly is concluded that it is an important part of the trip [7].

III.   METHODOLOGY

The method used for the preparation of this article is that of a systematic literature review. For this reason, the author has selected articles related to the topic, and has used a variety of online information on the Internet from 2000 to 2015. The main criterion of the research was finding in the abstract of one or more of the following terms: mobile technology, tourism, travelers applications. By first analyzing the items, some of them were excluded because, by reading further, it was found that they were not suitable for this topic.

IV. RESULTS

4.1. E-projects with a direct impact to social cohesion

Some European Union initiatives such as INTERREG IVC have introduced some projects like Gender4Growth or DART which tackle issues related to employment in the context of gender equality or ageing/ declining population respectively. Some good practices, exchanged in these projects, are based on ICT tools. For example, women from the City of Vicenza, a project partner in Gender4Growth, can search for employment and training opportunities at the 'Infomamma' web-portal. Computer network also enabled the University of Verona from the same project to put in practice "E-Working T.I.N.A." initiative, promoting telework as a type of flexible work for women. 'Telework Romania' is a similar initiative, providing training on e-skills, identified by the DART project. Another good practice, 'IT over 40', assists the largest number of unemployed in productive age to acquire PC skills necessary for re-employment. ICT tools also help people overcome distances, formerly a barrier to learning. 'Developing E-Learning Strategies in Sparsely Populated Areas' provides their inhabitants with necessary skills, from nursing to vehicle mechanics, mainly through video conferencing and internet learning environments.

E-Tools for Life

Also there are identified good practices with ICT tools on social inclusion or healthcare services. Broadband, integrated into daily life of people like in 'Ons Net Nuenen' initiative from PEOPLE, can improve social cohesion and promote longer independent living of the elderly. Intergenerational ITC trainings, developed in 'Active Silver' from DART, involve the elderly and young disadvantaged people in overcoming the digital gap [8]

4.1.1 Using Technology and Tourism to encourage development in disadvantaged communities

Amadeus, a technology provider for the travel industry worldwide, has shown a new way to interact with the tourism sector while contributing to social development. With this objective, and within its Corporate Responsibility Program "Travel Further", the company presents a comprehensive project for Social Responsibility which aims to *"promote sustainable development for disadvantaged segments through tourism and technology in the markets in which Amadeus is present.* "This project seeks to use surpluses generated by the company in activities that contribute towards development in the communities where it operates".

One of the highlights of this project is the technology transfer project to enable the professional distribution of small hotels with scarce resources and access to technology. These small guest houses or bed & breakfast establishments, often located in rural areas, typically have no access to the professional sales channels or standard processes of the travel industry. The Amadeus small hotels distribution project brings them a technology platform with which to manage and distribute their offer online in a professional way. It also gives them access to a network of Amadeus travel agencies worldwide to sell their offer, hence expand their commercial reach [9].

4.2 Applications of mobile technology and ICT-s in the tourism sector

The number of applications offered in the market has increased significantly and a number of other key players are developing their application markets (eg Samsung, HTC, RIM, etc.). While the technologies for programming applications, as well as human resources that are focused on these applications exist and are growing day by day, it is in the interest of the Enterprises to adapt these applications at different devices in order to be used by potential buyers in the future. Application providers who program the applications to specific regions characteristics of operating systems for smart phones, may be of interest for tre tourism marketing.

The applications market is currently divided between the developers of operating systems like (Apple, Android, Ovi, Nokia etc.) and specific providers, who fit the requirements for different operating systems such as (Handango, Get Jar etc.) .

Below are some IT applications for iPhone, iPad and other smart phones and tablets:

4.2.1 iTinerary: personal itinerary on your smart phone

IPhone travel application called Itinerary offers mobile access to all information and services related to travel and are available from ISO, a system used by tour operators. This gives the customer an added value after distributes all the information in real time. Itinerary is also called - small app, huge benefit. In order to have full access to records of bookings is to download and install iPhone application itinerary. The application relates to the booking system and dismisses all the details of booked travel plan. So travelers can reach all the details of their services reserved - anytime and anywhere. An example of this might be a Google map that can be opened directly from the reserved hotel services, showing the location of the hotel traveler and his return back to his/her permanent residence [10].

4.2.2 The European Union Project Aladdin — mobile destination management for SME-s

Aladdin is a project supported by the European Union for the development of a mobile system destination. The system combines a mobile content and service management system for destinations with relevant information and booking technology for tourist guides and customers as the destination, as well as at home . This system is designed to support all service providers in destinations, and customers before traveling

To provide this service Aladdin fits for different scenarios, different types of travel, etc. such as: cultural tours in urban cities or vacation on the beach and different types of passengers (such as business , entertainment , groups or individuals) .

With the focus in the tourism market, Aladdin intends to provide small and medium-sized innovative mobile service and information platform to increase their business opportunities and competitiveness. Aladdin application offers tourists a wide range of information , according to the requirements, based on the location visited and is a support for tourist guides in their daily work. [10]

4.2.3 Augmented reality

Modified Reality (Augmented Reality) is closely linked with the development of mobile phone applications. It uses the functions of the smart phone camera to show some necessary data users about his place at a certain moment. This instrument can come to the aid of many passengers who are not familiar with many locations they visit. Many of these applications are free of charge or at low prices, but for the user it has a considerable value. One of the applications is the Wikitude augmented reality. Also, ArchINFORM Layar is another application, which shows users some indicators on the architecture of the surrounding buildings. It also shows a pedestrian route for users specific architectural elements for various objects that he can visit during a simple tour. Also, another application that becomes an augmented reality is AR Metro Pro, which consists of what is offered in the programs of navigation and mapping different, but with the additional option that can see through augmented reality.

4.2.4 Application Tricount

The free app for iPhone Tricount is useful for anyone who wants to share the costs of a trip or activity group. Who pays for the hotel, restaurant, transportation or cinema tickets? It is created an account, add members, and recorded costs and the application immediately registered all the costs in order to allocate costs fairly between group members (http://www.tricount.com).

4.2.5 Audiovisit-New tours with MP3

Guides with MP3 audio format are almost no cost and impressive. Audiovisit offers tours in France for 140 visits to cities, monuments, museums, natural landscape destinations, as well as temporary exhibitions. This program is downloaded to a mobile phone after a short registration process online. The main sequences of 30-40 minutes, are divided by themes into 20 sections, which are researched and produced professionally. [11]

4.2.6 Save time at the airport

Holders of an electronic ticket of Air France airline or KLM can control through their mobile phone thirty hours before their flight time. Upon arriving at the airport, they can simply take flight card (boarding card) from a terminal. An even easier option available to passengers on flights to / from Amsterdam, flight cards is sent directly to passenger mobile by SMS / MMS or email. (http://mobile.airfrance.com)

V.   CONCLUSION

To conclude with, it can be said that the significant increase of Internet users in the world and it's low costs by mobile phone companies, and other mobile devices, significantly has increased the demand for the purchase of smart phone, iPhone, iPad, tablet etc., enabling people to access million tourism-related applications. Smart phones are very useful tools to travelers. They may have a very little "tour guide" in their pockets. Employment and employability of people are closely linked to so-called 'e-skills' today, i.e. the ability of an individual to use standard information and communication technologies. ICT tools open new opportunities not only for entrepreneurs and job-seekers, but for all people, be they young, older, handicapped, or disadvantaged. Some e-tools improve social inclusion of the elderly or otherwise disadvantaged; other provide better services to the sick; yet other open new channels for participation in regional or local policy-making. While the technology for applications programming, also the human resources that are focused on these applications are growing day by day, various tourism enterprises are adapting these applications to various devices to be used by potential buyers in the future. Mobile phones are becoming more useful instruments to perform quick booking travel, to see the images of the country to be visited and to be informed about various services that tourists can consume during the trip. Those practices facilitate different sensitive social groups such as people with dissabilities, elderly people, rural ones etc.

Social networking sites like facebook, instagram, etc are being used more and more to share holiday photos tourism and provide a range of information about them, making it a completely reliable and marketing at no cost on tourism services. Mobile telephony is bringing important impacts on the tourism industry, forcing many tourist tourism enterprises or national tourism organizations to create their web sites in mobile version.

REFERENCES

[1]   UNWTO. (2015). UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. Volume 13. October 2015. p.1
[2]   Kao, Y., Louvieris, P., PoWell-Perry, J., Buhalis, D. (2005). E-Satisfaction of NTO's Website Case Study: Singapore Tourism Board's Taiwan Website. School of Management, University of Surrey, UK
[3]   Proximamobile, 2013. The European Portal of Mobile Services for citizens. Mobile phones and their impact on the travel industry. As accesed in September 2013 from http://www.proximamobile.eu/article/mobile-phones-and-their-impact-travel-industry
[4]   Tourism e-Kit., 2011 MobileTechnology For Tourism, Tutorial 50, Australian Tourism Data warehouse

[5]   UNWTO.PRACTICUM. 2012. English Edition: Tourism Communications and Social Media, As accessed in September 2013 from. http://themis.unwto.org/en/event/unwtopracticum-2012-english-edition-tourism-communications-and-social-media
[6]   ITU. 2013 The world in 2013, ICT Fact and Figures, 2013 UNWTO. UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, Volume 11, 2013
[7]   WTTC. 2013. World Travel & Tourism Council Global Summit 2013. Session 3 - Technology And Social Media: What's Hot, What Next?. As accessed in September 2013 from http://www.wttc.org/events/abudhabi-2013/global-summit-neës/day-two/session-3-b
[8]   INTERREG, (2014), E-Tools:A way out of Europes Blues   [Online] Available: http://www.interreg4c.eu/focus-on-e-tools/ (January 22,2016)
[9]   UNWTO. (2011). World Tourism OrganizatioN. *Affiliate Members AM-reports – Technology in Tourism* (Vol. 1, 2011), Madrid
[10]   ISO Travel solutions. 2013. Tourism Software for Mobile Devices. As accesed in September 2013 from http://www.isogmbh.com/services/travelsoftware/tourism-software-for-mobile-devices.html
[11]   Proximamobile, 2013. The European Portal of Mobile Services for citizens. Mobile phones and their impact on the travel industry. As accesed in September 2013 from http://www.proximamobile.eu/article/mobile-phones-and-their-impact-travel-industry