

# THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND APPLICATIONS ON THE SELECTION OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the paper is research and analysis of the impact of social networks and applications when selecting a tourist destination in Croatia. Social networks and applications have become essential for communication between users, but also for the presentation of tourist destinations to potential tourists. In the survey, whose results we present in this paper, 100 tourists participated. Survey questionnaires were distributed through social networks to a random sample of respondents during their stay in the Republic of Croatia. The survey was carried out in May 2017.*

**The objective of this survey was to analyze how many tourists who come to Croatia know and use social networks and applications when choosing their travel destinations and how information from social networks influence their choice of places to stay. According to the results of the survey there is a significant correlation between the age and the level of education of respondents and the time that they spend a day on social networks and then between knowledge of social networks in the group and ways of planning their trips. The analysis of the results shows that there is a significant correlation between the age of the respondents and their selection of travel destinations through social networks and applications.**

**Keywords:** *social networks, applications, tourist destinations, research, significant correlation*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Croatia's tourism industry, most of the last century, was following the market strategy for mass tourism and this practice continues today even though many entrepreneurs and local officials across the country are aware that such a strategy is not the best for Croatia. Today, isolated attempts to change the paradigm of Croatian tourism get a swing, and if they are allowed to flourish, the climate of competitiveness must radically change. [1] The value of Croatian tourism comes from a centuries-long history of Croatian people and its current reality. It is based on the pride of the Croatian people of their country, its nature, culture and society, and it is based also on the firm belief that this wealth must be presented to the world.

Despite numerous development initiatives and emphasizing the priority of the reduction of seasonality and the development of other products, the share of sun and sea is in total Croatian tourist product for year does not fall below 85% of the physical volume with a slightly smaller share of revenues (75-80%), with respect to its average lower rents caused by the large capacities of family accommodation in households. In addition to falling behind in the development of infrastructure for other products and other internal factors, this is definitely affected and remained stable demand in the global market and the state in a competitive round of the Mediterranean

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countries (Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Turkey). In these circumstances, Croatia was showing better results in tourism in the last ten years. [2]

Ecotourism gets more and more developed in tourism, generally speaking. It creates opportunities for the development of tourism-poorly developed regions and for the maintenance and the financing of protected areas. Ecotourism has two important segments: small groups with special interests in ecotourism who thus spend the whole holiday and a great number of those who spend their holidays such as at the beach, but also go on short excursions. Organically produced food is another component of tourism and ecology, which becomes an important factor in defining the tourism product and its differentiation in the market. Assumptions for the production of organic food and its sale in catering facilities that provide tourists, need to systematically develop and exploit because it is a sector of tourism which will increasingly gain in importance. [3]

## **2. SELECTION OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS AND APPLICATIONS**

The World Tourism Organization has defined a tourist destination as an important place to be visited during the trip and distinguishes between three types of such destination: a distant destination, the main destination and motivating destination. Destination often becomes synonymous with tourist site, zone, region, country, group of countries or even continent. [4]

Keller defines a tourist destination as the target travel by tourist who wants to visit the works of certain attractiveness of the destination offers. This attraction can be natural or the result of human labor, existing before tourism and tourists or otherwise made for tourists. [5] Destination can change its offer, but also it can change their visitors, directing the placement of those tourists who accepted its offer and thus stop the fall in tourist traffic. [6]

The Republic of Croatia adopted a special Ordinance on designation and classification of tourist sites in February 1992, which included even 530 places in four classes (A, B, C and D), depending on the stage reached in tourist development. The classification of tourist sites by categories is based on the number of overnight stays and turnover in catering for individual settlements in relation to population. The science of tourism attaches great importance to destination, regardless of its scope. Destination is an important factor in tourism development and therefore in the tourism economy in general. The importance of destination stems from the fact that it creates conditions for the development of entrance tourism and that tourism, with an offer that serves it, becomes initiator of economic life and the overall development of some spatial units. [7]

Social networks in the tourism industry have changed the way how people explore, gather information, make decisions and share their experiences. While people choose their destinations, they use social networks to conduct research: content, offers, accommodation and useful pieces of advice of other tourists and similar. When tourists choose their travel destinations most important facts are as follows: the attractiveness of the destination, the quality of the tourism offer and availability of information. Each tourist company must be „online”, to provide useful information to potential guests. If it is not present on social networks, it is very likely that it's competition is present, and every company in the tourism sector strives to be the best in its industry.

TripAdvisor has strong influence in the tourism industry and every month it gathers 50 million visitors who are in active search of their ideal destination. It is on TripAdvisor that tourists usually search

information about the opinion of other people who have visited a particular country, city, restaurant, hotel, apartment and others. According to research, when selecting a tourist destination, tourists believe more to individuals, rather than the objects themselves who present their products or services. It is not possible to satisfy all the tourists/clients, and today more than ever, tourism enterprises need to think about providing quality service, because one negative comment on TripAdvisor or on another site, has echoed as five positive comments.

Facebook has over 800 million active users and it is a perfect place for the promotion of products or services in tourism. It provides „intimate” communication with the constant and potential guests and just Facebook page of a tourist company and its contents can be crucial for a guest who has just decided, because of it, to visit a hotel/restaurant/service. Tourists visit the company’s Facebook page to find out more information and to communicate with other tourists.

There are other social networks in tourism that are highly visited, like Instagram, which is based on visual elements, exactly photographs. For tourism activities visual component is really important. A Facebook page should have a good and quality content with cleverly designed strategy, where the focus is on the delivery of quality, not quantity. Croatia last year recorded a record number of tourist arrivals which in August was 5.5 % higher than in the same month last year. Istria, Split-Dalmatia and Kvarner achieved great number of arrivals and overnight stays, but Istria definitely excels with its 2.98 million arrivals (growth of 7.7%) and 19.8 million overnight stays (growth of 5.4%). [8]

Research of Croatian National Tourist Board in 2017. analyzed the behavior of tourists under the influence of social networks before travelling. According to the results, it is under the influence of information on social networks that 33% of tourists changed the hotel, 10% changed the agency, 10% of them changed destination, 7% changed country trip, and only 5% of tourists changed their port of travel. The study analyzed the activities of tourists on social networks after their journey. The results have shown that 46% of tourists published reviews about its location and attractions in the area, 40% of them published reviews on restaurants, 76% published photos from the trip on social networks, 55% of tourists „liked” pages on Facebook which are related to annual leave, 40 % of tourists published reviews on tourist activities and attractions. [9]

Results of TOMAS research - summer 2017 has shown that holidays at sea (i.e. passive vacation) motivated more than half of all guests to come to Croatia (a total of 55%). Its importance has significantly decreased compared to 2014 (from 75% to 55%), while on the other hand, the growing importance in the selection of Croatia as a destination with gastronomy and motifs associated with active holidays as the motive of the arrival there, the following reasons appeared: experiences and adventures (with 31% of tourists), gastronomy (29%), exploring the natural beauty (26%), entertainment (24%), sports and recreation (20%) and a number of other motives such as wellness (8%), health reasons (7%) etc.

Results of TOMAS research - summer 2017 also shown how the Internet is the main source of information for tourists coming to Croatia and on it relies 44 % of guests (44 % in 2017 compared to 30 % in 2014). After the Internet, followed by the media through which information is collected (25 % of tourists), the recommendations of relatives and friends (24 %) and previous stay (18 %). Every other guest booked accommodation directly with the accommodation facility, and 38 % of them use the services of travel agencies when booking accommodation. Increasing share of guests who pre-book accommodation: by 12 % points the share of guests who use the services of travel agencies, and by 8 % points of those who book their accommodation directly with the accommodation facility. There was growing share of tourists who book accommodation more than three months before departure. [10]

### 3. THE GOALS, BASIS AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE RESEARCH

In this survey research there were involved 100 respondents, i.e. tourists. Survey questionnaires were distributed via social networks to respondents during their stay in Croatia. The survey was conducted in May 2017. The objective of this survey was to analyze how many tourists who come to Croatia know and use social networks and applications when choosing their travel destinations and how information from social networks influence their choice of places to stay.

Most of the respondents were aged 18 to 25 years, even 63.3% of them. They are followed by 19% of those who have 26 to 30 years, then 13.1% of respondents aged 31-40 years. At least the respondents who participated in the survey were those aged 41-50 years (3.2%) and those 51 years and over (1.4%). Most respondents have secondary education, 45.20% of them. With the completed undergraduate studies there were 27.6%, while those with graduate study 26.7%. Only 0.5% of respondents had a doctoral degree.

For the statistical analysis, this paper uses the analysis stemming from chi-square tests and correlation coefficients to examine interdependencies. The statistical study used the software package SPSS 21. In the sequel of this paper we will explain how we tested the hypotheses based on the results of our survey. Individually we will analyze each H0 and H1 hypothesis.

**H0:** There is no significant correlation between the age of respondents and the time they spend on social networks.

**H1:** There is a significant correlation between the age of respondents and the time they spend on social networks.

The results of the survey have shown that respondents spend 5 hours and more on social networks, even 92.9% of respondents aged from 18-25 years, and 7.1% of them aged 26 to 30 years. None of the respondents from 31 to more than 51 years do not spend so much time on social networks. When the results were analyzed by the method of Pearson Chi-Square, it turned out that there was a significant correlation between age of participants and the time they spend on social networks, given that ( $X^2 = 27.303$ ,  $p < 0.007$ ), as shown in the table 1. With reference to the  $p$  significantly lower than 0.05, it was confirmed that in this case there is a significant correlation with regard to this result, hypothesis H0 is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	27.303	12	0.007

Table 1. Chi-Square Test

**H0:** There is no significant correlation between the level of education of respondents and the time they spend on social networks.

**H1:** There is a significant correlation between the level of education of respondents and the time they spend on social networks.

The results of a survey have shown that 31.8% of respondents with high school spend less than 1 hour a day on social networks, and those who have completed their undergraduate studies 13.6%. Respondents who have completed undergraduate studies (50%) spend less than one hour a day, and with the degree of doctor of sciences only 4.5% of them. The results have shown also that 42.9% respondents with secondary education spend more than 5 hours per day on social

networks. There are 42.9% of them with completed undergraduate studies. 14.3% Respondents on social networks spend more than 5 hours with graduate degree, while there are no respondents with degree of doctor of science who spend so much time per day on social networks.

When the results were analyzed by the method of Pearson Chi-Square, it turned out that there was a significant correlation between the level of education of respondents and the time they spend on social networks, given that ( $X^2 = 16.969$ ,  $p < 0.049$ ), as shown in the table 2. With reference to the p lower than 0.05, it was confirmed that in this case there is a significant correlation with regard to this result, hypothesis H0 is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.969	9	0.049

Table 2. Chi-Square Test

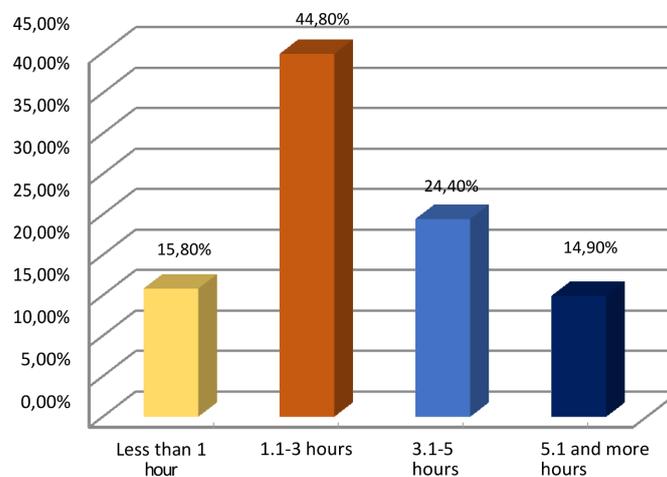


Chart 1. Time that respondents daily spend on social networks

In Chart 1, which shows summary data without division by age and level of education of the respondents, it is seen that most of the respondents spend 1-3 hours on social networks, 44.8% of them. 24.4% of respondents spend 3.1 to 5 hours on social networks, while 15.8% of them spend less than 1 hour. 14.9% of respondents spend 5.1 and more hours on social networks.

**H0:** There is no significant correlation between respondents' knowledge of social networks and ways of planning the trip.

**H1:** There is a significant correlation between respondents' knowledge of social networks and ways of planning the trip.

The results of a survey have shown that only 4% of respondents who are travelling on vacation only through travel agencies know social networks, while 72.7% of respondents who have been planning their trip are familiar with social networks. 23.2% of respondents who plan their trip combined, individually and through travel agencies are familiar with social networks. When the results were analyzed by the method of Pearson Chi-Square, it turned out that there was a significant correlation between knowledge of social networks in the group and ways of planning their trip, considering that ( $X^2 = 26.421$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as shown in Table 3. Since p is significantly lower than 0.05, it was confirmed that in this case there is a significant correlation with regard to this result, hypothesis H0 is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.421	8	0.001

Table 3. Chi-Square Test

**H0:** There is no significant correlation between the age of respondents and the selection of a tourist destination through social networks and applications.

**H1:** There is a significant correlation between the age of respondents and the selection of a tourist destination through social networks and applications.

The results of a survey have shown that 65.2% of the respondents aged 18-25 years completely agreed with the statement that their use of social networks and applications helps in the selection of a tourist destination. It also considers 23.1% of respondents in age 26 to 30 years. Only 7.7% of respondents from 31-40 years have the same attitude, while none of the respondents aged 41 to 51 and more did not have an opinion that the use of social networks and applications helps when choosing their travel destinations in general.

When the results were analyzed by the method of Pearson Chi-Square, it turned out that there was a significant correlation between the age of the respondents and their selection of tourist destinations through social networks and applications, given that ( $X^2 = 31.388$ ,  $p < 0.012$ ), as can be seen in table 4. Since the  $p$  is significantly lower than 0.05, it was confirmed that in this case there is a significant correlation with regard to this result, hypothesis H0 is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.388	16	0.012

Table 4. Chi-Square Test

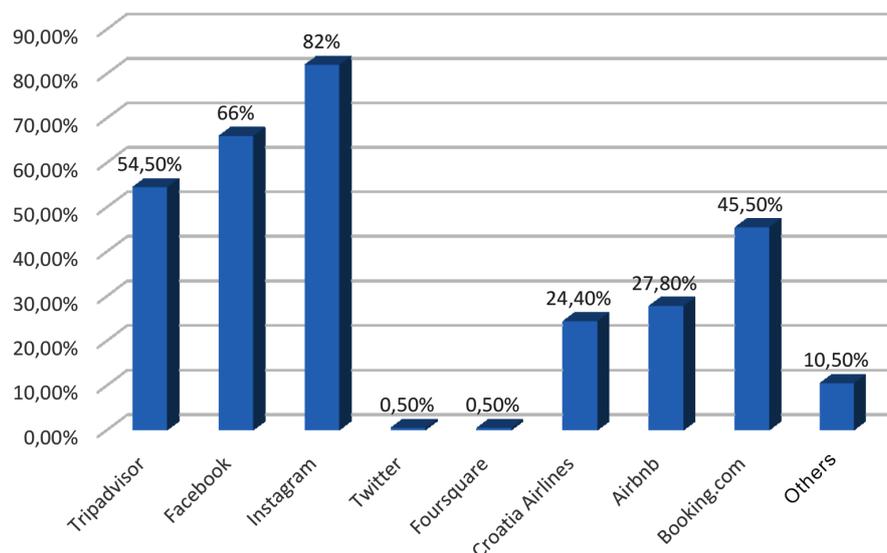


Chart 2. Use of social networks and applications while selecting a tourist destination

In Chart 2, which shows summary data without dividing the age of respondents, it is seen that when choosing tourist destinations, respondents mostly used social network Instagram, even

82% of them. In determining their tourist destination, 66% of respondents used Facebook, while 54.5% used Tripadvisor. 45.5% of respondents used Booking.com, while 27.8% of them choose their travel destinations relying on Airbnb. 24.4% respondents used Croatia Airlines, and to a lesser extent respondents decided for some other (10.5%), Twitter (0.5%) and Foursquare (0.5%).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Social networks in the tourism industry have changed the way people explore, gather information, make decisions and share their experiences. While tourists choose their destinations, they use social networks to conduct research: content, offers, accommodation and useful advice of other tourists and similar. Each tourist company must be „online” to provide useful information to potential guests. If it is not present on social networks, it is very likely that his competition is, and every company in the tourism sector strives to be the best in its industry.

The results of the survey presented in this paper have shown that there is a significant correlation between: 1) age and the level of education of respondents and the time that they spend a day on social networks and 2) between the knowledge of social networks in the group and the ways of planning their trips. The analysis of the results shows that there is a significant correlation between the age of the respondents and their selection of travel destinations through social networks and applications. This research results can be used by all marketing experts in tourism, tour operators and tourism companies, and are the perfect base for future research on a similar topic.

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