

Chapter 16

Communication Tools in the Customer's Journey: Application to the Tourism Sector

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ABSTRACT

There are several paths in marketing to communicate with the consumers. More creative ways are reaching to the market increasing the fascia and trying to overcome customers' demands. Consumers have changed and are now more informed, demanding, and empowered. They are talking with brands and about them with other consumers but also about their personal experience, which means that the impact of the communication between them has evolved in massive terms. The new trends in digital communications has brought profound changes to the tourism sector. Tourists are now more critical in their decision-making process. The increasing access to new technologies by individuals has made travel research and planning easier, placing the stakeholders in a permanent challenge to meet the consumer's needs. In this respect, some points come out: are the new means of communications fundamental determinants in the consumer decision purchase in tourism products? Will companies beneficial to start including this new means as communication tools? Should they be incorporated in their communication plans?

INTRODUCTION

With the continuous evolution of society and technology, shifts in consumers' attitudes and behavior are expected to arise. Taking common behavioral traits into consideration, the creation of new groups of individuals and consumers are highly expected. All generations are daily consumers of products and services. They all have different characteristics and distinct behaviors, what makes it a challenger for brands to manage their full attention and ultimately keep them as loyal customers.

The emergence and evolution of the Internet, as well as continuous technological progress have had significant impacts on consumer behavior and marketing strategies. These two fields have suffered and continue to undergo profound and irreversible changes. According to Cantallops and Salvi (2014), a major aspect that influenced these shifts in consumer's attitude and buying patterns was the evolution of technology. In fact, it is believed that the main determinant that changed everything when it comes to consumer behavior was the arrival of social media platforms (Lin *et al.*, 2011). Social media changed not only the way consumers communicate with each other, but also the way they communicate with brands. By using the Internet, consumers not only learn more about products and brands as also communicate with businesses and other consumers. Consumers can express their opinion more effectively, spread it easily over the Internet and see their peers' opinions. Recommendations became mediated electronically and with high levels of reliability, particularly among young people. Similarly, with the appearance of the Internet and with some type of websites, consumers began to have access to unlimited product information allowing them to investigate before making a purchase (Labrecque *et al.*, 2013). A study by Statista (2018) emphasizes that the number of social media users has been increasing over the last ten years and it is predicted to keep growing exponentially. This growth justifies the different behavioral traits in generations, since they now have more access to information from all over the world and consequently have become more connected with each other. The outcome is a decreasing effectiveness toward consumer of traditional media marketing strategies (Wright, 2005; Groeger & Buttle, 2016).

Consumers' purchasing decision is influenced by a large number of factors that can be divided in two major groups (Solomon, 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2012). The first group is related to surrounding environment, including all sociological and psychological elements that affect the consumer. In this group we can find influential aspects such as culture, subculture, social class, reference group, contact group and family. Conversely, the second group comprises individual factors that make each consumer unique, aspects such as motivation, experiences, self-image, personality and attitudes. All these factors work together and affect the choices that each person makes. Indeed, decisions are mainly based on the assessment of concrete and contextual situation of each individual and the perception he/she builds from the limited information possessed. It is also accepted that consumers have different strategies to make decisions and take in serious consideration the effort required to make any particular choice (Solomon, 2009). Since social media usage has been increasing and registering massive numbers of daily usage, digital influencers have become the perfect opportunity for brands to take a chance on being daily present in consumers' lives. Like any other form of marketing, marketing through social media platforms is expected to have direct effects on consumers' actions (Miranda *et al.*, 2016; Loureiro & Sarmento, 2017). According to several authors, it can bring substantial advantages for brands in terms of building brand awareness (e.g., Dehghani *et al.*, 2016; Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Hoffman, 2010; Mangold *et al.*, 2009), consumer's willingness to create a purchase (e.g., Dehghani *et al.*, 2016; Castronovo & Huang, 2012; Mangold *et al.*, 2009), and lastly to increase their level of loyalty toward the brand (e.g., Labrecque, 2014; Castronovo & Huang, 2012).

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