

Smartphones - a powerful Tool for Tourism. Romanian Travel Apps

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Abstract

Smartphones are an integral part of everyday life, and more people buy the latest technology, including tourists. Technology evolves at an exponential pace, smartphones are increasingly becoming an indispensable accessory and less a luxury item, like it might have been considered before. The smartphones are now a powerful tool for tourists and travelers, thanks to the mobile applications that help so much the independent travelers.

Keywords: tourism, travel, smartphone, mobile phone, Internet

Introduction

Technology is essential in today's tourism. Today's tourist is an informed person, who wants to travel fast, to be able to communicate instantly and to make online reservations and also pay online - he is changing his wishes and expectations very often and tries to adapt to the market shifts swiftly.

Smartphone can guide the tourist through the city; help him to find the best locations and sights/means of transport. Tourists now are

able to combine social media and smartphone technology to send photos and share impressions on various sites, like e. g. Facebook, post comments, upload videos on You Tube, and update their own blogs while traveling.

Smartphones ability to unite people in giving them access to new databases and information quickly became a valuable instrument for the tourists. Smartphones are thus an inevitable partner for tourism, while tourism itself became a fertile ground for mobile computing (Dickinson et al, 2014)

Literature review

Smartphones and fast mobile Internet access have transformed nearly all facets of life, while travel experienced some of the most dramatic changes. Today's smartphones and apps can translate words live on screen, give real-time transportation advice, locate you anywhere in the world, act as your boarding pass, book your dinner reservation, and even help you find a cheap, last-minute hotel room (Business Insider, 2013)

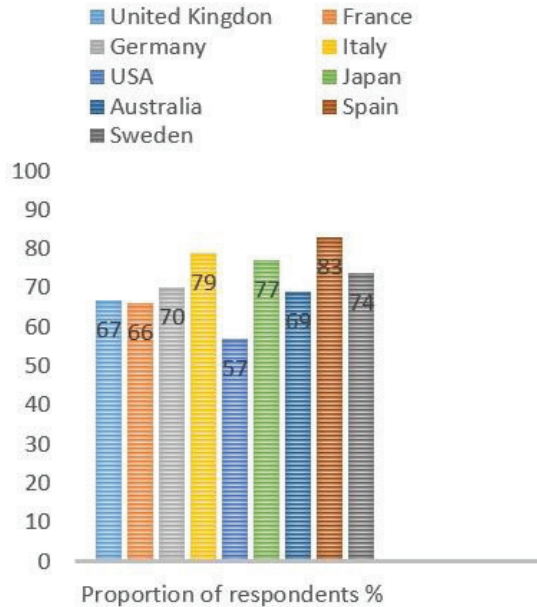
Growth in smartphone ownership continues in 2015 according to Ofcom (Ofcom, 2015). Spain reported the highest take-up at 83%, an increase of 6pp in 2014. UK smartphone take-up stood at 67%, an increase of 4pp in the previous year. Two countries reported the same levels of take-up as last year; 77% of respondents in Japan and 69% in Australia claimed to use a smartphone. The US had the lowest take-up of smartphones (57%).

As the society has become networked, and networks have become ubiquitous through the use of mobile telephones, societal practices are undergoing a radical transformation, no more so than in the domain of travel. (Dickinson, et al, 2014)

At this moment there are about 2.6 billion smartphone subscriptions in the world. Among the smartphone users, about 80% use them every day, surfing also the internet, and more than 60% use apps and are accessing social media from a smartphone. (Frâncu, 2013)

Recent studies show that smartphones and their applications have the potential to assist travelers by providing easy access to information anytime and (almost) anywhere (Wang, Park, Fesenmaier, 2012)

OWNERSHIP AND PERSONAL USE OF SMARTPHONES



Source: Ofcom, 2015

Inexpensive Smartphones are opening new opportunities for marketing and commerce in emerging markets, where many consumers previously had no access to the internet. (eMarketer, 2014). Mobile phones are already an everyday reality for most people. Smartphones will become a necessity and even a habit in the very near future.

Table no. 1. Worldwide mobile and smartphone subscriptions

Mobile subscription essentials	2014	2015	2021 forecasts
Worldwide mobile subscriptions (million)	7,100	7,400	9,100
Smartphone subscriptions (million)	2,600	3,400	6,400

Source: Ericsson Mobility Report, 2015

Research

Just as the Internet completely revolutionized the way consumers book travel, now the immense, growing reliance on mobile devices is causing a second shift in how travel is purchased. Today, rarely anyone leaves their home without their mobile phone, and twice as many people are using SMS globally compared to email. It is imperative for hotels to tap into this growing market. (Rusu, Cureteanu, 2009)

Transport apps

Available for Android and iPhone, Paravion app allows the tourist to make reservations for various flight options and to choose the most convenient one considering its price and time schedule. Ticketing is free. The customer will have to pay only if he decided to buy the ticket, the confirmation for the reservation and ticket issuance are included in the package. (Paravion Tour, 2016)

Avion.ro is designed to be fully functional on mobile devices. Site functionality is tailored to the needs of mobile users and adapted for touchscreen. It works on Android, iPhone and iPad. (Avion.ro, n.d.)

TAROM customers can book and purchase tickets, online and on smartphone. The customers can book trips on mobile phones equipped with operating systems like iOS, Android or Windows Phone. If accessing TAROM website from a mobile phone, it automatically detects the type of mobile device used and redirects the user to the mobile phone version and it is not necessary to install a dedicated application on smartphone for booking. (TAROM, n.d.)

Wizz Air launched in Romania a free application for iPhone and iPad, for reservations and services. With the help of the application, customers can buy tickets, can change a reservation, can add services or consult flight schedule. Over several weeks, users can and do check-in online.

For ticket reservation is necessary for the user to log in and be a member of Wizz Discount Club, which has a fee of 135 RON/year. The other options of the application can be accessed without having to login. (yoda.ro, 2013)

There are other similar sites for booking flights online in Romania like bileteavion.ro, momondo.ro, ro.airtickets.com, esky.ro, vola.ro, decoleaza.ro, skyscanner.ro, airpass.ro, zbori.ro, decoleaza.ro, tripsta.ro etc.

If the smartphone user doesn't intend to travel by plane, he could easily go by train, and thus use the Mersul Trenurilor CFR Călători pentru mobile (CFR Timetable for mobile phones). With this application customers can get information about the timetable in a format suitable for mobile devices with a smaller data transfer, which leads to a more rapid access to train schedules. (CFR Călători, 2012)

At the same time for the passengers who purchase tickets through the CFR Online Tickets app it is not necessary to print the travel document, the person identification being performed with the electronic ticket itself or with the ID card of the customer.

In Romania there is also InfoAutogari app, which shows the timetable information for all buses and coaches, detailing the date and place of departure and destination, and the company operating on that route with its contact details. (Autogari.ro, 2013)

In Timișoara customers have the opportunity to learn about routes and arrival times of each bus or tram by using the Public Transport – Timisoara application. Arrival times shown are calculated in real time through GPS devices installed in each vehicle. The application connects to Regia de Transport Timișoara (RATT) servers to get arrival times and display them in a format optimized for Android phones and tablets. (Balint, 2015)

Public Transport Company (CTP) Cluj launched a mobile application, Bus CTP Cluj - Napoca, through which customers can buy tickets on public transport, mobile payment helps to simplify the travel due to the permanently available digital wallet on smartphone.

Also in Cluj, an interactive application - Cluj Bus, was launched officially in 2015. Translated into four languages it aims to facilitate the way users are traveling by public transport in Cluj-Napoca, and encourage them to use this system of transport. It is available in four languages (Romanian, French, German, English), and it allows users to keep up with the stops and points of interest around them, as well as available bus lines. The application is compatible with iOS 6.0 on iPhone, iPad and iPod touch, and is optimized for iPhone 5, iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus. (Cluj Bus, 2015)

Auto.ro is another interesting application for drivers, helping them to buy road vignette at any time, to pay traffic fines, to acquire car insurance, to buy travel insurance depending on the country of destination and even contact an auto service if having problems with the car. (Auto.ro, n.d.)

Accommodation apps

Cazare România provides access to a database with information about hotels, hostels, lodges and holiday homes. The tourists can search on the map for the place they want to go or the accommodations and touristic attractions nearby, they can read the reviews or see the costs, book directly from the app, ask offers or call the accommodations. (Infoturism Media SRL, 2014)

With Tourist Informator - Romania (by Refero Group Software), the tourist can discover the most popular destinations in Romania. It has a route planning added, an integrated map for easier navigation, and is a multilingual iPad and smartphone platform in Romanian, Hungarian, English and German language. (Refero Group Software, 2013)

MoBooking Romania is another Romanian app, offered by Teen Telecom, which is able to show more than 250,000 accommodations worldwide, and compare deals on over 120,000 destinations. (TeenTelecom, 2012)

Various travel apps

Harta României (Romania map) application can be used as a GPS navigator; the traveler does not need internet connection to view the map. It can be used as a tourist guide to easily find interesting places in Romania, containing a detailed list of points of interest for tourists, accommodation options, parking locations, restaurants, bars, clubs, cinemas, theaters, auto services, fuel stations, shops, parks, schools, hospitals or areas dedicated to sport. Includes detailed maps of major cities in Romania: Bucharest, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Constanța, Craiova, Galați, Brașov, Ploiești, Brăila, Oradea, Bacău, Arad, Pitești, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Baia Mare, Buzău, Satu Mare, Botoșani, Râmnicu Vâlcea and others. (Mapedy, 2015)

Asociația Prietenii Muzeului Național de Istorie a României (APMNIR) in partnership with the National Heritage Institute (National Database of Museums and Collections in Romania - <http://ghidulmuzeelor.cimec.ro>) and the Romanian National Committee of ICOM (International Council of Museums) have developed the "Museums and Collections of Romania" bilingual (Romanian and English) application, which provides information (address, opening hours, telephone, web site, description) about all of Romania's 1014 museums, and more than 5200 photographs. Various search filters are available, allowing the selection by name, category (archaeology and

history, art, religious art, ethnography, memorial, natural sciences, science and technology), locality, county, historical region (Banat, Bucovina, Crişana, Dobrogea, Maramureş and Sătmar, Moldova, Muntenia, Oltenia, Transilvania) or distance from the user's current position. The museums can also be displayed on the map or in an augmented reality module. As the database is stored locally, an Internet connection is only necessary for accessing photographs, maps and navigation related features. (APMNIR, 2013)

A team from Romania released an app for sightseeing the cities located on an interactive map. CeSăVezi is dedicated to those who want to discover the city by walking on foot to the most interesting targets. The application has options for accommodation, bars and restaurants, but also for the state of the roads. It also has a menu to find out the weather in real time. (Proactive HR Profile, 2013)

With the Redescoperă România (Rediscover Romania) app the tourist can find various destinations in the country. The app offers access to a database of places waiting to be discovered and the tourist can establish a route and find brief information about different tourist attractions from a list and see how to get to them. (Breeze Mobile Marketing SRL, 2013)

Salvamont is the official app of the National Mountain Rescue Association in Romania (Asociația Națională a Salvatorilor Montani din România - A.N.S.M.R.), conducted in partnership with Vodafone Romania. With the help of this app the tourist can plan his hiking time, being aware of the most important weather warnings, with the latest information about weather, hiking trails, contacts, facilities and locations of chalets and slopes in the region. During the trip, even without Internet access, the tourist has access to the map to locate chalets around him or to guide him on the mountain.

Most importantly, in the SOS section there is a phone position locator service available that can notify Salvamont rescue dispatcher in real time about the route, coordinates, altitude, and even phone battery level. (Vodafone România, 2014)

Conclusions

Global smartphone sales now comfortably pass one billion handsets per year. They have become an integral part of life for large swathes of the world's population, particularly in more developed societies. (Ofcom, 2015)

There are an increasing number of self-dependent tourists who are traveling by themselves, using the smartphone applications as their main guide.

Consumer behavior for tourism services in Romania is changing extremely rapidly. At the same time, more Romanian tourists are constantly using mobile phones or tablets for online reservations or to purchase travel packages.

The mobile applications market for tourism services in Romania is also growing at a rapid pace. Country travelers have access to high-performance mobile applications, which can help locate the best restaurants, bars, hotels, or accommodation in general, across the world, buy plane, train or bus tickets, find museums, theaters, cinemas, shops or other places to visit etc.

The studies in the field of tourism still have much to understand regarding the complex implications of occurring changes caused by the evolving mobile technology.

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