Understanding Millennials’ Trip Planning Preferences in Connection to Social Media

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Abstract

Abstract As technology is progressing, the use of social media is increasing in relevance in the field of tourism research. Thus, different studies (Expedia, 2016; Xiang et al, 2015) have dealt with the use of Internet in travel planning. Among these, Kim, Xiang, & Fesenmaier (2015) performed a cross-generational analysis of differences in Internet use. Contrary to the general belief and some other studies (Expedia, 2016; Xiang et al., 2015; Simms & Gretzel, 2006), the results implicate that there are no major differences across different generational groups. While most of the studies related to social media consider Millennials to be the generation of travellers that is most engaged in the active use of Internet (Expedia, 2016; Gretzel et al., 2009; Xiang et al., 2015) and online social channels, a true understanding of the exact travel planning preferences and behaviour of this group is still lacking in the scholarly literature. Some of the unanswered questions are related to understanding 1) Millennials’ use of social media and other information sources in trip planning, especially when it comes to online booking and organising their trips in detail; and 2) which factors really matter to them in the vast sphere of social channels available on the Internet? As a result, the main purpose of the study is to understand how Millennials behave while planning their trip. More specifically, the aim of the paper is to provide an understanding of the Millennials’ trip planning behaviour 1) in connection to the use of social media as compared to trip information available in traditional offline sources; and 2) in connection to their booking behaviour once they reach the purchasing phase. Methodologically, the paper is rooted in the positivist tradition, making use of a quantitative self-administered online survey. The data has been being collected in the summer of 2016. The multivariate analysis is used in this research in order to identify the exact preferences and differences of social media use in travel planning among Millennials. This study further looks at the trustworthiness and relevance of different social media channels and information sources in the trip planning process among Millennials. The results generated from this study will advance the theoretical knowledge regarding Millennials’ preferences in relation to social media use. Moreover, these findings will further serve in examining the gap between the role of social media and their influence in the phase of information search as opposed to the phase of online booking. Hence, the results will be useful for tourism marketers who are targeting Millennials as their main market segment.