PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE: THE CASE OF UNDERGRADUATE TOURISM MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Consumer preferences at the interface between client and tourism service provider are characterized by large changes occurring nowadays. Observation of these changes may help in determining future required competencies required by an employee of a tourism service provider as well as technological trends used in communication and concluding transactions between companies and consumers.

Accordingly, it is useful to analyse students' experiences on searching a tourism service to understand their preferences and in a second stage to apply these experiences to build knowledge for future job engagement as a potential tourism service providers.

This paper presents the first step of an ongoing investigation that focuses on the tourist services experiences and construction of knowledge on undergraduate tourism management students. We report and discuss the result of a survey conducted involving the students of Tourism management at The Jerzy Kukuczka Physical Education Academy in Katowice - Poland. Structured questionnaires based on a 12-item importance scale were administered to a convenience sample of 220 respondents. Research questions are in the range of youth preferences regarding searching for information and communication with tourism service providers. Therefore, what payment channels are selected what are the preferences associated with the use of mobile applications in dynamically changing reality and websites. The changes taking place in 2015-2019 in the above areas was also be analysed. The research was carried out, in each case, in the spring months. For our survey, we used "Google form tool" and "Statistica 13" software suite. The χ² test was used for data analysis.

From our research, it emerged that the preferred means of searching information about a tourism service provider searching the web, for communication purposes, the email and mobile phone are the most important software/device; Booking.com resulted to be the most popular tourism platform. The analysis of personal experience and construction of knowledge of students of Tourism management at The Jerzy Kukuczka Physical Education Academy in Katowice has influences in the restructuration of the course syllabuses on “Information and Communication Technologies in tourism organizations”.

Keywords: Consumer preferences, Higher education students, Personal experience, Tourism Management, Tourism Service Providers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Conceptual knowledge is often embedded as a resource in argumentation on modern education. The University curriculum emphasize that students should be able to use their knowledge acquired in the classrooms – lectures / workshops / seminars – as a tool to formulate independent standpoints based on empirical facts. University students should also be able to critically examine facts to see the consequences of different alternatives and be able to find the right answer to a concrete problem. One example of the frequent use of knowledge among the students of Tourism Management in the classroom is during workshops, where the main source of information is Internet.

The concept of “knowledge” is not homogeneous, which should be taken into account in the context of the construction of new fields of study based on knowledge and learning processes in new realities. M. Kleiber defines the knowledge society as such, in which the processes of creating, transferring, processing, storing, using knowledge and managing it are widely recognized as the basic factors of civilization and economic development [1]. According to the World Bank, the economy becomes an "knowledge economy" when the main factor in the process of economic development is the continuous use and creation of knowledge. Knowledge economy is one that uses knowledge as the main driving force of economic growth. In such an economy knowledge is effectively absorbed, created, transferred and used to accelerate economic development [2].
A. Kozminski [3] present an interesting way of understanding what knowledge-based economy is. In his opinion an economy in which many enterprises operate, which base their competitive advantage on knowledge is a knowledge-based economy.

As our research presents personal experience as a base where to construct knowledge in undergraduate students of tourism management, it is important to make reference to concepts like: "information economy" and "knowledge-based economy". This differences on are shown in Fig. 1. On the right of the triangle are definitions of data, information and knowledge, whereas on the left side are examples of application of the concepts. The price of PLN 4.2853 is given. If this price is placed in the context of the exchange rate in relation to 1 euro (Euro – PL - 5.05.2019), it will happen information. If, in turn, this information is interpreted by a person operating on the currency market, then we are dealing with knowledge.

Using the criterion of taking the place of occurrence of knowledge and its availability we can divide the knowledge into two categories:

- **explicit knowledge**: it is organized, systematized and stored knowledge that can be stored and transferred in various ways, eg in books, reports, patents, databases, the Internet. It is characterized by easy accessibility and the possibility of using. At any time, we can read something from the collected documentation, saved databases and other media;

- **tacit knowledge**: which we are aware of and which we use in everyday activities, but we are not able to define it to the end, and thus its formalization and transfer to other people is very difficult. Silent knowledge accumulates with experience in every human being, yet we cannot clearly specify it and explain it.

B. Lundvall i B. Johnson introduced a different division of knowledge [4]:

- **know-what**: refers to the knowledge of facts. How many people live in Poland, what pancakes are made of when the battle of Grunwald took place, are examples of such knowledge. Knowledge is limited to information here - it can be divided into fragments and easily transferred as data;

- **know-why**: it is knowledge about cause and effect relationships concerning the laws of nature, man and society. This type of knowledge is extremely important for technological development in certain science-based areas, such as the chemical or electrical / electronic industries. Access to this kind of knowledge will affect faster technological progress;
• **know-how**: knowledge related to skills, or the ability to do something; it is the knowledge that experts have and is gathered in the form of experience they have gained, as well as the experience gained by others; public access to this type of knowledge is very limited and its transfer is difficult;

• **know-who**: includes information on who knows what and what to do. The challenge is to identify knowledge holders, reach them and use their knowledge. It also includes the social ability to cooperate and communicate with different people and experts.

In order to relate this typology to development processes, we can say that in successful attempts to create innovative solutions, the decisive role is played by tacit knowledge, which includes practical skills to achieve the desired results (know-how) and practical understanding of human resources, enabling cooperation (know-who). This knowledge cannot be reduced to the unequivocal knowledge of facts (know-what) and scientifically recognized regularities (know-why) [5].

2 METHODOLOGY

202 people participated in the study, including 121 women and 81 men. The average age was 22.5 (standard deviation 1.53). More than half of the respondents lived in large cities of over one hundred thousand (54.7%), 30.5 percent in smaller cities and 14.3 percent in rural areas.

The research was conducted at the turn of April 2015 and 2019 using Google forms. Statistica 13.1 package from Dell Inc. was used for statistical analysis.

For the survey purposes, the Google form tool was used to create an online questionnaire, and then an online survey was conducted by means of hyperlinks.

The results available through the Google sheets have been transferred to Statistica13 of StatSoft, Inc.. Single-choice closed questions, multiple choice and hierarchical questions were used in the questionnaire. For data analysis, descriptive statistics and quantitative techniques (Little 2013) were used. To verify the hypothesis that two qualitative features in a population are independent, the χ² test was used to compare the observed frequencies with the expected frequencies

\[ \chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \]

where:

- \( O_i \) = the number of observations of type i
- \( E_i \) = the expected number of observations of type i

The Internet can be overridden by our hearts and minds. Almost no one can imagine life without it [6]. This is also shown by these studies. Only one person has stated that he does not use the internet. In turn, four people recognize that they use the internet no more than an hour a day. Less than ten percent use it for 2 hours. The largest number of respondents stated that they spend between 2 and 4 hours in a day and one third between 4 and 6 hours. However, 13% spend on the internet for over 6 hours. It shows how much the global network is affecting us today.

3 RESULTS

This research presents the first step of an ongoing investigation that focuses on the tourist services experiences and construction of knowledge on undergraduate tourism management students. The results of the structured questionnaires (sample of 220 respondents) we present in three main areas: Mobile devices and information management, Mobile Application development in the Tourism industry and Use of the experience gained in planning a trip in a tourist company workplace.

3.1 Mobile devices and information management

The use of mobile devices for Internet connection is widely used [7]. One of the devices we analysed deeply was the use of smartphones for searching information. In the question: "How much of a percentage do you use it with a mobile phone?", eight percent of respondents estimated that up to 25% in the set of 26 to 50% there were 16 percent of respondents, almost one fifth contracted in the range 50 - 75% and most respondents (57%) is defined as people who use Internet to a large extent (over
75%) using a mobile phone. It shows how our reality is changing dynamically and shows the multi-functionality of smartphones that have long ago ended up being a simple device for voice communication.

Every year, young consumers are more and more convinced of the usefulness of the Internet as an assistant in finding interesting tourist services. On a scale from 1 to 5 where "1 - not at all useful and 5 - is very useful" this year, 67.8% of respondents marked option 5 - and is 5.6% more than 4 years ago. This results in increased use of the internet to search for interesting attractions. In the question about the use of the internet to the above, where "1 - I do not use at all and 5 - I use only the Internet", the group that uses only the Internet is growing. Almost half of the students use only the Internet for this purpose, which is an increase of 6.2% compared to the 2015 survey.

3.1.1 Channels of communication between the client and the travel company

It may be interesting to ask what communication channels with the company are more and less popular. Question: "On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 - it is not needed at all, and 5 - is badly needed, evaluate the importance of individual communication channels between the client and the tourism company?" Was asked in relation to different communication options with the company.

There is less attachment to such channels as the discussion group. A few years earlier, more than half of respondents (54.6%) assessed this form as important or very important. In this year's studies, only 42.1% have considered it so.

Also a form of communication such as e-mail is less important for the respondents. 4 years ago, 89.4% of respondents described this channel as important or very important, and this year, by almost 13% of respondents, this is less.

So what in the opinion of students is gaining weight in communication? It turns out that a fun page on social networks is a beneficiary of the attention of young consumers. In 2015 - 43.8% considered this channel to be very important, in 2019, 55.4% think so. The channel, which is the chat, has been practically reviewed. Both this year, 44% (44.0% in 2019, 44.8% in 2015) rated it as important or very important.
Examining the differences between men and women, it can be noticed that in general women rank the importance of particular channels as communication possibilities. In the case of discussion groups, even statistically significant differences (chi2 = 15.22 at p = 0.00425) can be noticed for the other channels, the differences are noticeably smaller.

It is interesting to answer the question what is your favourite way of communication with a travel company. In 2015, most frequently e-mail was chosen - 55% of respondents chose this option. Next in the ranking was a personal face-to-face interview (17%) and a telephone conversation (16%). In this year's studies, students completely ignored the conversation face-to-face. None of the respondents described it as a favourite, in the sense it lost the email, which was chosen by 45% of students while it received a telephone conversation (46%). There are also noticeable differences between men and women in channel preferences. 40.2% of women prefer e-mail, 30.8% of men, and almost half of men (46.2%), and only 35.9% of women prefer a telephone conversation when communicating with the company.

E-mail as a basic communication channel also underwent some evolution. Exactly, consumers have much higher requirements regarding the company's response time to a given question. Over half of respondents (55.7%) believe that this time should not be longer than 12 hours. 39.7%, in turn, gives the company time to answer from 12 to 24 hours, the remaining 4.9 percent of respondents from 24 to 48 hours. In similar studies conducted in 2013, these requirements were much lower. In addition, you can see that women are more impatient than men. Over 60% of female students and 48% of students prefer a response time no longer than 12 hours.
indicated that they would like to have an answer within 12 hours. These differences, however, are not statistically significant.

Having in mind the e-mail, it is worth looking at how often respondents receive tourist advertising and what they do with it. Every tenth (9.85%) respondent specifies that he never gets one. Over one third (36.9%) admit that every few weeks, and the largest group - 41.37% - every few days. This is not a bigger problem for students. The most popular behaviour in this case is among young people simply ejecting the e-mail to the trash or spam. Two-thirds of respondents do so. However, a quarter of respondents read such letters for "satisfying curiosity." Almost 3 percent of respondents admit that they search the advertised tourist service on the Internet. The remaining 6% are different behaviours such as "sometimes I read, sometimes not", "I mark but do not read".

3.1.2 Internet sites as a source of tourism service information

Important aspect while using the web for searching information about tourism service providers, shown the research to carried out to our students. Thus, it can be seen that even within a year there may be dynamic changes. The most frequently visited portal is booking.com. However, from 37.1% of responses in that year, the portal dropped to 31.2% in this. The same trend, although smaller decrease, was recorded by Trivago (from 25.8% to 20.6%) and Groupon and other group purchases (22.3% to 21.4%). On the other hand, Airbnb showed a huge growth, which from 4.2% of responses in that year jumped to 18.8% this year. The fact is that for many this platform is an increasingly interesting solution for longer than 2-3 days stay. Among other answers were wakacyjnipiraci.pl, fly4free, or pages of specific travel agencies.

Over the last years, there have been significant changes in the method of payment. The question "What payment channel are you choosing for the services or products ordered on the Internet?" The most popular answer is "fast Internet transfer" - exactly one third of respondents thought this way this year. This number grows even more, if the respondents are asked about the payment they prefer first, then 44% of respondents choose a quick transfer. Even four years earlier, this traditional bank transfer was the most popular and chosen by over half of the respondents. This year this percentage fell to 23.5. Mobile payments (14.2%) and standard payment in cash on delivery (7.8% of answers) are becoming more and more popular.

In view of the fact that young consumers are increasingly involved in a mobile phone, it is worth knowing what habits are associated with it. The question "What price of a paid application is acceptable for you (per year)?". Almost three-quarters of the respondents (74%) chose the option of free applications only, another 15 percent stated that an acceptable price for them would be 10 PLN per year, 7% of respondents, that no more than 25 PLN and only 4% recognize that they could pay more than PLN 25 within a year. Certainly, this is due to the fact that there are many free applications in almost every field in the network, so it is difficult to motivate students to buy a paid version. This brings with it specific problems in the monetization of your business ventures related to application development.

![Fig. 5. Web sites use in the selection of a tourism service provider](image-url)
3.2 Mobile Application Development in the Tourism Industry

Students could exchange up to 5 applications the most important for each of them. In this way, the ranking shown in the figure with the comparison from the previous year was made.

In the current year, the most popular applications were: Facebook - exchanged by 79% of respondents, with an increase in popularity compared to the previous year by 9%. Instagram recorded a large increase (from 36.6% to 64%). There was also a messenger on the proverbial podium - 60% of respondents mentioned this application used for communication. On this occasion one should notice a decrease in the popularity of another application which is WhatsApp (from 14.2% in that year to 9% in the current one). Almost every fifth person surveyed also marked the bank and postal application among their most important, and a certain surprise is that the application named fitatu - calorie counter - a year earlier not mentioned at all this year is noticed by 10% of respondents.

![Fig. 6. The most popular applications among the respondents](image)

3.2.1 Online vs offline information sources

Important aspect to be analysed was the way students keep information about their planned trip and tourism services. A very small percentage (6%) answer that a printed paper of the itinerary or a map of the trip is would be used during their trip experience. 17% of the respondents would use offline map as and a copy of their itinerary on their mobile. About 47% affirm that an online map and online itinerary is used during their trips. 80% of respondents will use navigation system along the way (ex: google map, phone app), but what is a surprise is that the traditional way of asking people for directions, just wonder around the city or visiting a tourist centre is still high (51,11%). Most of students will use Mobile Apps for Cities, Counties, Local Government (77%).

![Fig. 7. Information Sources in Travel Planning](image)
3.3 Use of the experience gained in planning a trip in a future work in a tourist company

There is a different ways how students of Management can used the knowledge acquired from a tourism service providers' or trip experience. One of the most important aspects is that the future employee will be able to use the experience in such a way that will be able to recommend to potential clients the best places at the best possible prices.

Our research shows the following practical application of the knowledge acquired from the future tourism service providers’ experience:

- Will be able to present the experience of every visit in a given country to new clients, to present them suitable places depending on where they want to go, whether they want to visit or relax. Customers who are their regular clients receive information about places worth seeing.
- Will be able to advise his clients on travel and planning.
- Thanks to his travel planning experience he will know which directions to promote, choose and which ones to avoid.
- Opportunity to advise clients by using knowledge from their own experience and not from pure theory. I think that thanks to this I will be a more reliable service provider.
- Thanks to the experience gained, he will be able to fully satisfy the needs of clients, knowing what suits himself and what does not.
- I will use my experience in planning a trip at work in a systematic way to check and prepare everything before starting a job / task. When preparing myself, I will use as many sources as possible to know exactly where to start and be well prepared to take up a job.
- Use his own experience when planning transport, accommodation and tourist attractions. The offer presented in this way will be more beneficial and more attractive.
- Will plan a trip based on the most popular forms of information at a given time. The trip plan will be based on trends and mods circulating the world. One of the most important factors will be the analysis of the environment.
- Will rely on proven sources of information - recognized websites, press, contacts. They will use the experience not only at work, but also in their private life.
- Thanks to the experience gained, they will be able to solve conflicts and difficult situations faster and more accurately, they will have greater competences and broader knowledge so that their work will be more effective.
- They will be better prepared to work in a tourist company, thanks to the practical knowledge gained during their private trips. Thanks to this, the travel plan will be more accurate, more interesting, adapted to changing conditions, which will attract customers and make us win their trust.
- The experience gained will make it easier for us to plan a trip, to diversify our stay in a given place, give us more opportunities to learn about the attractions of a given place.
- They will be able to advise their clients more accurately and interestingly plan trips with regard to places worth paying attention to. Predict at least partially the risks and threats that may arise.
- They will use the experience gained to organize the trip without any problems, in such a way that all customers will be satisfied. They will use the knowledge gained about the most interesting places and classes for the group that can be realized during the trip and what to pay particular attention to when booking hotels or transport. Thanks to the news from classes about the possibility of risk or threats, I will know how to deal with them.
- They can translate the experience gained during their trip and visit to planning and organizing a business trip.

In general we can say that the knowledge acquired thanks their own travel experience can be used in planning, organizing, motivating and controlling future tourism services’ activities. The students are prepared to offer clients tourism services according to customers’ needs. And most important will have a better knowledge how to prepare the best webpages and apps for their future business.
4 CONCLUSIONS

From our research, it emerged that the preferred means of searching information about a tourism service provider is searching the web, for communication purposes, the email and mobile phone are the most important software / device; Cell phones take over a large part of the way they browse and use the internet. The use of mobile applications is also associated with this. And although the most popular applications are global like Facebook, messenger or Instagram, this is also the place for many other applications related to e-mail, access to banking services or helping in proper nutrition and being active. Booking.com resulted to be the most popular tourism platform. However, Airbnb is the biggest growth dynamics and has initiated a new model of travel.

Knowledge acquired from personal experiences tend to remain in our memories for a longer period and has impact in the way we communicate with our environment. The rationale behind this is that the most you feel your personal experiences the more likely you will remember them better than any other indirect experiences from classroom instruction. For instance, knowledge we learned from our own trip experiences is more likely to have impact in the future workplace.

In terms of knowledge acquisition, both the personal experience and classroom instruction are essential and the role of the teacher is to use in the classroom the personal experience of future managers to build a knowledge platform. Classroom instruction insures a broad range of knowledge to be delivered efficiently as in time-consumption. The experience gained in planning a trip will be very useful in future professional work in a tourist company. Thanks to the experience gained in planning and searching for tourism services, the student is able to practically look at travel planning, to predict a number of situations that can happen during the preparation. know from which sources / applications to use best to plan a trip. Experience in sightseeing allows them to get to know different cultures, people's behaviour.

The knowledge gained by experience help them to prepare better the final works to be presented at the end of the semester. The analysis of personal experience and construction of knowledge of students of Tourism management at The Jerzy Kukuczka Physical Education Academy in Katowice - Poland has influences in the restructuration of the course syllabuses on “Information and Communication Technologies in tourism organizations”.

REFERENCES


