

## **YOUTH TOURISTS' PROFILE AND THEIR TRAVEL CHOICES AS INFLUENCED BY SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The development of Social Media has conveyed important changes in the behavioural models of tourists, as well as, in the way users search, assess, produce, purchase and consume information, products and services. The scope of this paper is to study the effects of Social Media on youth tourism, the profile of young tourists' actively participating in Social Networks, as well as, the effects of information absorbed through them on their travel decisions. The research was based on a sample of 254 young people between 16-29 years old with the use of a questionnaire of 25 close and open questions. It is designed to examine the demographic and specific traits of young people and the way of planning their trip through information and stimuli they receive from Social Media. Research found that although young people spend much time for their activities in Social Media, the rates of influence in their tourist behaviour is not as high as those of relative researches in abroad. This finding is not necessarily negative, since the presence of portal and travel magazines, travel agency are being felt more and more in Social Media. It has, also, been found that users are more positive to add to their contacts travel portals and magazines than commercial enterprises, because their environment is more friendly and familiar to the user. Moreover, these kinds of Social Media cultivate a travel climate that often leads the user to make a trip.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth Tourism, Social Media Networks, Information & Communication Technologies

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The integration of social networking and new technologies in daily life of users and especially of young people is increasing. The new media introduced new possibilities providing new opportunities and challenges for those who are involved in the tourism sector. Tour operators, potential consumers, producers, active travellers are brainstorming, advice, propose, evaluate products and services and a range of other activities that take place in the world of social networking and new technologies. For first time, the consumer - traveller participates actively, not only as tourist who make use of tourist product but he is also given the opportunity to report his opinion or express need and desires, which can lead, in turn, to the creation of new products.

All this process leads tourism industry to some disconcerting as it has to understand the impact of SM on the tourist market in near future. Hence, tourism sector is invited to build a new reality, investing on innovation and transparency, since travellers are bombarded with a barrage of online information in real time, many of them indigested. Therefore, there is an ongoing effort for efficient use and development of new technology tools, in order to approach travellers in the most effective way, asking for informal cooperation. This cooperation brings to travel industry substantial reduces in the promotion, advertising costs of products and research, but particularly enables that to be in tuned with the consumers' needs to the benefit of both.

The scope of this paper is to study the constantly evolving business field of youth tourism and the influence of Social Media (SM) in destination products choices. Particularly, the interest of this topic is based on (1) the significant role of new technologies and social media in users' daily life and (2) young tourists' profile, as the most active generation of the present and future digital area.

The phenomenon of social networking has excited many researchers at international level, because of the rapid development of new technologies and has made efforts to study their relation to the traits of young people personality, and especially those related to their travel behaviour. Although no any previous research study is identified in Greece yet, it appears that future surveys will be focused on the research of social networking in of users' day-to-day lives. Due to the lack of past literature, it was considered necessary to study the influence of Social Media (SM) and Information Communication Technology (ICT) to Greek young tourists.

## **YOUTH TOURISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Previous studies showed that SM and new technologies affect young travellers while the publications regarding SM and ICT are continually increasing. Surveys on youth tourism are mainly drawn by the study "New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel" of the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association of Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) in 2003, as well as, the last and update survey of World Tourism Organisation (WTO, 2008) in cooperation with WYSE Travel Confederation.

According to the above surveys of WTO and ISIC-ATLAS, the general level of recognition of student and youth travel by the countries was relatively low so far. This may be influenced by the fact that the importance and multiple impacts of youth travel to global tourist market have recently begun to be appreciated by governments across the world, and they are now taking a more active role in developing youth travel policies, products and marketing campaigns, as referred to the WTO report (2008).

However, the youth tourism is not yet recognised by the government policies as a niche market of travel industry. The report of WTO (2008), inter alia, provides a definition of youth travel which is derived of the study of all previous definitions. Accordingly to the WTO, "youth travel includes all independent trips for periods of less than one year by people aged 16-29 which are motivated, in part or in full, by a desire to experience other cultures, build life experience and/or benefit from formal and informal learning opportunities outside one's usual environment".

On the other side, the new media, as well as, the influence of SM in the daily life of the users has gain the attention of many researchers abroad. Boyd and Ellison (2007) outlined features of Social Network Sites (SNSs), proposed a comprehensive definition and presented one perspective on the history of such sites, discussing key changes and developments. Westbrook (1987) defined the e-WOM as "Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) can be defined as all

informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers”.

Litvin et al. (2008) investigated the influence of both positive and negative WOM in tourism products and studied the significant role that Word-of-Mouth has traditionally played as information source in travel and tourism. Yoo and Gretzel **Error! Reference source not found.** reported some aspects of CGM (Consumer-Generated Media) and defined them as “a new form of word-of-mouth that serve informational needs by offering non-commercial, detailed, experiential and up-to-date information with an access beyond the boundaries of one’s immediate social circle”. They also studied the influence of personality on travel-related CGM creation.

Line et al. (2010) investigated the role of ICTs in everyday mobile lives (activities and travel) and explored the ways in which ICTs are being used by students aged 18–28. Xiang and Gretzel (2009) reported the influence of social networking to online activities and their effect on tourism. Moreover, Qualman **Error! Reference source not found.** investigated how SM transforms the way we live and do business. Finally, since the matter of Social Media seems to be confusion among managers and academic researchers about what exactly SM is and what they include. Specifically, the confusing comes from the similar but at the same time different terms of Web 2.0 and User-Generated-Content (UGC). Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) made an in-depth analysis of these concepts and concluded that “Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”.

By contrast, very few Greek publications approach the concept of the influence of SM and ICT in the tourism sector, as those by Rerres and Kafeza (2009). They reported, inter alia, that the digital technology reduces factors which prevent realization of travel, change tourists’ consumer preferences, as well as, the purpose of a journey. However, there was no any research found on young people.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data of the study are based mainly on primary research through quantitative analysis. The research was carried out by using a distributed questionnaire to SM users, between 16 and 29 years old, as young tourists defined by WTO. It is noted that the gathering of secondary data were mainly sourced from the international references and less from Greek ones. The scope of the survey was achieved through the research of the identity of Greek young tourists involved and active in SM and make use of ICT, as well as, the effects of receiving information through SM and ICT in their travel decisions. More specifically, the sub-aims are (1) the demographic and specific traits of young people and (2) the way of planning their trip through information and stimuli they receive from SM.

At first stage, the research was structured on the method of random sampling and specifically in option stratified and subjective sample. At second stage, used non-random sampling combined with selection of a snowball sample.

The survey was conducted in the middle of 2012. The responses were collected from 254 young people who had profile account in SM, such as Facebook and Twitter. The questionnaire was posted on on-line software programme of statistical analysis [www.kwiksurveys.com](http://www.kwiksurveys.com) and was distributed via e-mail to potential participants with a cover letter. The users were asked to answer a questionnaire of 25 questions grouped into five topic sections including information as briefly described below:

- *1<sup>st</sup> Section.* The demographic profile of young tourists such as gender, education, employment, etc.
- *2<sup>nd</sup> Section.* The young's tourists relationship with SM and ICT like how many profiles in SM they have, what means they use to access into them, how often they visit their profile, how necessary they consider SM for their contact with friends, relatives etc. as well as for their information.
- *3<sup>rd</sup> Section.* It examines how young travellers plan their trip through SM and how their decision is influenced by the interaction with friends and other info they receive from SM.
- *4<sup>th</sup> Section.* It intends to gather information about the channels communication of SM and ICT are used by the young travellers during their journey.
- *5<sup>th</sup> Section.* It provides information about young's travellers activities upon completion of their journey and specifically the travel material (pictures, video, texts, etc.) posted on young's users profile in SM.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

On the basis of the collection and statistical processing of the data provided by the survey, the most important results are presented in the Table and the Figures below.

*1st Section*

Information about the demographic identity of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Demographic characteristics		Quantity	Rates (%)
A. Gender	Female	142	55,91
	Male	112	44,09
B. Age	26-29	86	33,85
	23-25	67	26,38
	19-22	53	20,87
	16-18	48	18,90
C. Family status	With family	124	48,82
	Alone	64	25,20
	Partner (in marriage or no)	39	15,35
	Fellow student/s - Flatmate/s	21	8,27
	Other (e.g. brothers)	6	2,36
D. Educational level	Tertiary Education	142	55,91
	Secondary Education (Lyceum)	40	15,75
	Master/PhD	37	14,57
	IVT (Institutions of Vocational Training)	34	13,39
E. Employment	Students in tertiary educ.	93	37,05
	Employees in private sector	78	31,08
	Free lancers	29	11,55
	Students in secondary educ.	19	7,57
	Unemployed	17	6,77
	Public servants	11	4,38
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Table 1: Demographic characteristics of 254 young users

Findings show that:

A. Female users (56%) are more than male participants (44%). This rate follows that found in the survey of WTO (2008) on youth travel underlining the increasingly important role of female travellers in youth market.

B. Regarding the age, the age group 16-18 participated in percentage 19%, the ages from 19-22 in proportion 21%, the group 23-25 years old approximately 26% and the older age group 26-29 reached the highest percentage 34%. It shows an increase from the younger to the older age.

The age target group was classified into four sub-groups as follows: 1. 16-18, 2. 19-22, 3. 23-25, and 4. 26-29 years old. This age class structure was based on the survey was conducted by the international organizations ISTC and ATLAS with the title New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel–Today’s Youth Travelers: Tomorrow’s Global Nomads (Richards and Wilson, 2003).

C. 49% of young people live with their family, 25% lives alone, 15% lives together with its partner (in marriage or no), 8% lives with its fellow student/s or flat-mate/s and 3% share an apartment with its brother(s).

D. 56% of the responders are students or graduates of tertiary (higher) education, 16% belongs to the last level of secondary education (almost 7% students and 8% graduates), follows a percentage of 15% that has Ph.D. or Master degree and 13% studies in College (IVT-Institutions of Vocational Training belong in a level between secondary and tertiary education).

E. From the sample of 254 users, 37% are students, 31% employees in private sector, 12% freelancers, 8% students of secondary education, 7% unemployed and 4% civil servants.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Section

This section presents the specific characteristics of the young users.

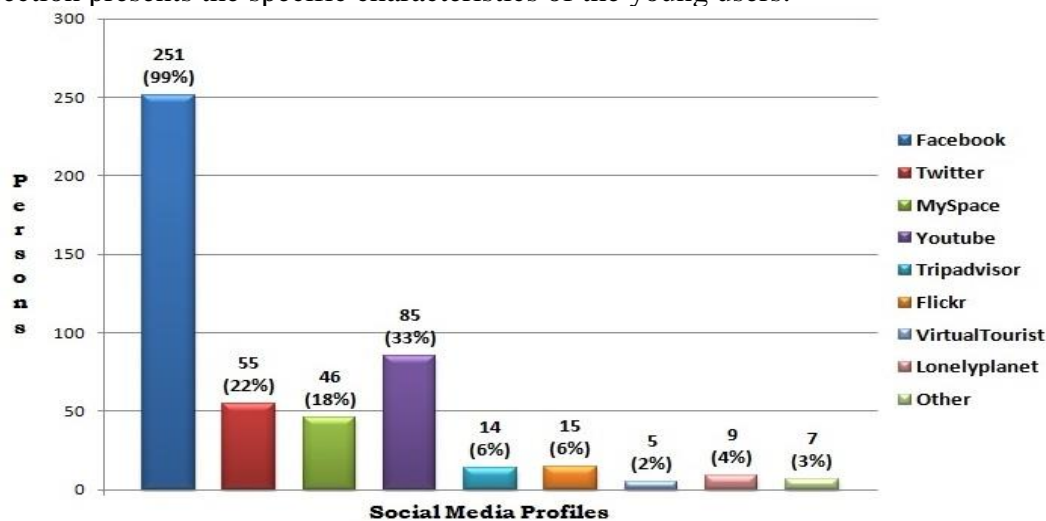


Figure 1: SM Profiles

The young users tend to have more than one account profile in SM. From the sample of 254 respondents, 99% has a Facebook (FB) account and at the same time most of the users have an account in others SM and specifically, almost 33% maintains an account on YouTube, 22% is registered on Twitter, 18% in MySpace, 6% in Flickr and 4% in Trip Advisor, Lonely planet, etc. Not surprisingly, the FB is on the top of users’ preferences as confirmed by the survey of Carlson (2010). By contrast, the travel SM doesn’t cover high percentages compared to other networks of general interest.

The fact that FB is the leader of SM drives the tourism industry to the commitment to set up partnerships with the most popular tourist sites like Tripadvisor to promote their activities. More specifically, Tripadvisor has launched integration with FB that instantly personalises

the site for each person who visits, surfacing trusted reviews from friends, most popular destinations among friends, and an interactive social map, as shown in Figure 2 (Eyefortravel, 2010).



Figure 2: Partnership between Tripadvisor and Facebook

Source: <http://www.eyefortravel.com/distribution-strategies/facebook-tripadvisor-partnership-results-instant-personalisation>

Within these partnerships, innovative tools are created continuously, in order to offer to the users who travel as many ICT applications as possible. In consideration of the intangible nature of products and services of tourism, its identity relies essentially on the quality of services as well as on the power of image, an element that follows almost every activity in SM. Therefore, the use of ICT and SM is a significant tool for tourism. On one hand, because the tourist product is promoted on audiovisual form in real time and on other hand because the product is evaluated through the interaction of the users-travellers in SM. Another dimension by the use of new technologies for both sides (tourist operator and user) is the gradual change of commercial relationship to friendly, making communication more accessible.

On the matter of young people who have also more than one SM account, this may be due to the diversity of their specific characteristics, such as the content, the needs that cover, the services offered, the style of communication or interaction, etc. This users' behaviour related partly to the theory of social identity according to that individuals have different identities based on their group memberships and the identity of these groups becomes a part of one's own identity and the share of social identity may result in cooperation and influence as members interact based on the social categories they identify (Ellemers et al, 1999). Also, Litvin et al. (2008) refer that all this structure relies on the philosophy of e-WOM, which characterizes the operation of social networking.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Section

It explores how the young people plan their trip (information sources, influence by SM and activities, etc.) via SM and how much their decision of the journey is influenced by the use of SM.

A. Regarding the sources of information used by young people for planning their trip, 725 responses received since the question was multiple choices. Frequency rates are calculated based on the total sample of 254 people. 225 respondents (89%) chose the Internet as first option for planning their trip.

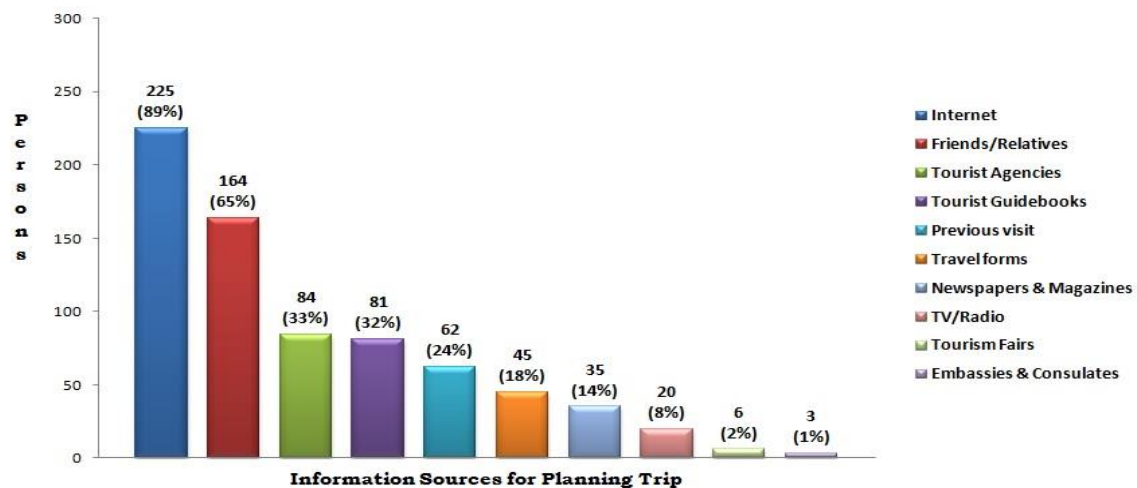


Figure 3: Information Sources for Planning Trip

This finding reflects the results of the WTO Survey (2008), as well as, other surveys, like Sheraton Hotels and Resorts in the USA (2010) **Error! Reference source not found.** and TIA (2008) which state that friends and relatives by 164 persons (65%) have chosen the internet at the same time, as well as, other options. Also, this result agrees with that by WTO (2008) Survey, as mentioned above. Consequently, findings of both surveys (this research and WTO) showed that young people, after the Internet, choose as source of information the points of view of friends, demonstrating the need from more personal information. This need for personal contact leads young people to use new technologies, such as SM, which facilitate the communication with others, giving them the ability to share material and ideas with fellow travellers.

Moreover, since travel products lack the features of pre-trial and frequent repeat purchases, this first-hand knowledge communicated by similar others who do not have commercial interests is seen as especially useful (Yoo et al., 2011). In the same framework, are presented the results by a study conducted by MASMI Research Company in collaboration with Fotis and Buhalis (2010). The survey, inter alia, reports that the views of friends and other travellers, found at least three times more trusted than traditional means of communication, such as travel agencies, advertising in mass media, etc. and almost 7 in 10 persons trust the recommendations of other users in SM for their information concerning a trip (MASMI, 2011). Thereafter, 84 young users (approximately 33%) tend to be addressed to Tourist Agencies for their journey planning, among other choices, and follow the experience gained from a previous visit by 62 people (24%). Afterwards, the guidebooks are chosen by 45 persons (18%) and followed Newspapers and magazines in percentage of 14% (35 people). Finally, Television and radio, Tourism Fairs and Embassies and Consulates are placed last by the participants.

In the context of personal communication, young people choose as a third sources of information the tourist agencies, which still keep an important role in planning trip because of the personal contact offered. However, the new technologies and their facilities tend to weaken gradually their previous position in tourism market, if they stay out from the new technology developments. The above data confirm findings of research and studies by Qualman (2009) and WTO (2008). Qualman (2009) also mentions that newspaper and magazines diminish in power. They state that there is less need to subscribe to costly newspapers when consumer are pushed more relevant and timely free content from their peers via SM. While traditional mediums were still trying to grasp how to handle the upshot of



blogs and user-generated content, SM suddenly comes along, causing yet another significant upheaval in the status quo.

B. Considering the question whether young people visit pages of National Tourism Organisations (NTO), which promote their advertising campaigns via SM (e.g. Breathtaking Athens, Visit Britain, Portugal Descobrir etc.), nearly 73% (186 people) indicates that they are not visiting the sites of NTO in SM and only a rate of 27% (68 people) replied positively.

This may be due to the fact that NTO have not yet strengthened their strategic development of a publicity campaign via SM, because they are likely to face SM as an additional promotion tool and not as one of the main media in order to invest more in them. However, tourist suppliers realize that SM is the most rapid mechanism to promote new products, services, actions and every new the tourist industry has to present. Electronic newsletters, such as [eyefortravel.com](http://eyefortravel.com) publishes any new in relation to tourism and SM. In Greece, all this effort is still in an early stage, but started gradually the first positive steps to this direction.

C. Concerning the use of a tourist offer from a tourist company in SM (i.e. airline, hotel, tourist operator, etc.), the participants were invited to answer to a double choice question, Yes or No. A percentage of 23% (almost 1/4 of the total sample) replied positively and 77% responded negatively.

Taking into account that SM provide timely and direct information, relative survey titled “When They Get There (and Why They Go)” by PhoCusWright (2010) showed that a similar result with over 1/3 of users is influenced by the discounts, offers and promotions of products and services of tourist providers activated in SM.

D. The young respondents were also asked to reply if they have ever choose the option “like” or if they have add travel SM (Tripadvisor, Expedia, Virtual Tourist) to their contacts in order to receive relevant updates or information. The results showed that 88 users (35%) responded positively by using the above option while 166 young travellers (65%) gave a negative response.

This may be due to the fact that users are influenced by psychological factors, which encourage them to act in a particular way in an on-line community. At this point is referring studies were carried out concerning the Five-Factor Model of personality (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness), which is relative with the SM. A study by Tuten and Bosnjak (2001) investigated the influence of personality on web usage and found that openness is positively related to using the Internet for entertainment and product information search, while neuroticism is negatively related to Web usage.

Acar and Polonsky (2007) studied the influence of extroversion in terms of online social network use and found that extraverts maintain bigger social networks. Moreover, Ross et al. (2009) examined how the Five-Factor Model of personality relates to Facebook use and creation. They state that persons with high extraversion were found to belong to significantly more Facebook groups but the number of Facebook friends they had was not significantly higher than those low on the extraversion personality.

E. The young people are also invited to respond if they see audiovisual material (pictures, video, recommendations, etc.) which has been posted by friends’ travels in SM (Facebook, Youtube, Flickr, Tripadvisor). Almost 69% of the sample enjoys watching friends’ profile and especially the posts uploaded from travels, while 78 users (31%) replied negatively.

This result is not in line with that of Skyscanner’s Survey (2011) which found that 88% love to nose through their friends’ shots with half of those admitting to doing so because “they could see what they had got up to and with whom!”

However, the percentage of 69% could be considered significant because may be affect a major part of his SM contacts, acting as travel promoter sharing the travel material on its profile. Since people still desire an understanding of what the majority of people are doing, Qualman (2009) says that “I care more about what my neighbour thinks than what Google thinks”.

F. The respondents (69%) of the question above who are curious what other users post are also invited to answer if their decision for a trip is influenced by their friends’ posts. From a scale of scale 1=of no importance to 5=very important, 36% of the participants considers this activity equally important, 33% less important and a 19% chosen the answer more important.

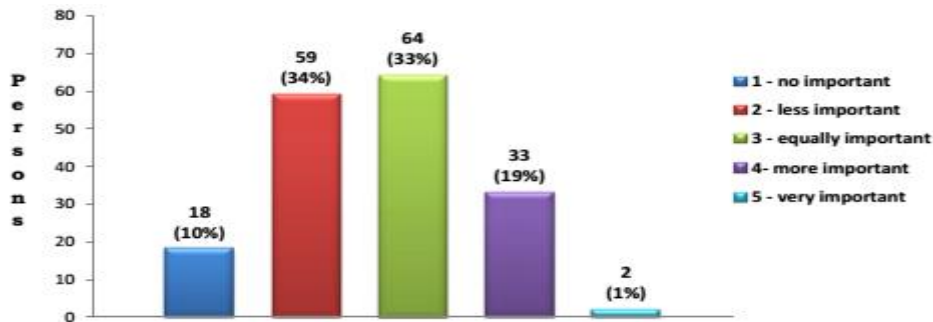


Figure 4: Making decision for a trip influenced by friends’ posts

The above result diverges with that by PhoCusWright (2010) research, which showed that over 3/4 of the travellers mention that their choices are influenced quite by travel reviews, photos and nearly 6/10 report that affected by users’ videos. Also, Skyscanner's Survey (2011), reports that more than half (52%) had been inspired by Facebookers’ travel plans so that to book a holiday to the same place.

G. In terms of visiting to friends from SM inside or outside of home region, almost 40% of young travellers have visited friends of its contacts. Although, a rate of 60% has not made a visit to friends from their contacts, the percentage 40% of users that responded positively, is considered important making the use of SM contacts motivation for organizing a trip.

Moreover, Tillema et al. (2008) reports that corporeal travel in physical space does not decrease due to the ICT-mediated possibilities for maintaining social relations and Kenyon et al. (2003) suggests that people use the Internet to ‘supplement’ the existing travel or as a substitute for an increase in travel. The above results are confirmed by Skyscanner research (2011), which notes that 45% of FB users are encouraged to visit their friends in abroad and despite some other reports that indicate that FB reduces real life contact, only 5% stated that being on FB actually means that was less likely to see friends from nearby.

#### 4th Section

It aims of receiving information concerning the activities of young travellers during their journey via SM. The results showed:

A. The communication channels used by young people during their journey are these as presented in Figure 5. More specifically, the users are invited to answer a multiple choice question, concentrating 673 answers. Frequency rates are calculated based on the total sample of 254 people. The results showed that the young travellers choose mobile phone in approximately 89% (227 persons) and text messages (sms/mms) via mobile phone at a rate of approximately 66% (168 persons) as first options, followed by e-mail with a rate of 44% (112

persons). Also, 30% (76 persons) keep contact with their friends and relatives via SM and 53 travellers (21%) refer that use Skype.

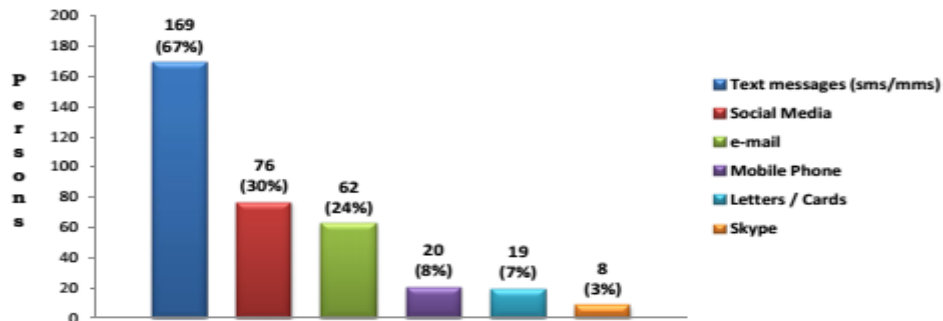


Figure 5: Communication Channels during travel

Consequently, mobile phone (calls, sms/mms) was the main communication channel used by youth during the trip in order to contact with their friends and relatives. Maybe it's just because of ease of use offered by this tool. Thereafter, followed the options are connected with the use of the internet (email, SM, Skype), although sometimes there isn't direct access everywhere. In the survey conducted by the WTO (2008), 80% of youth has identified internet as the most popular way of keeping in touch with home while travelling on a weekly basis or more frequently. On the other hand, young people who keep daily contact with friends and family use text messages (sms). In the framework of the possibilities offered by the Internet, calls via internet (Skype) and e-mails show also increase of these means (WTO, 2008). Finally, the percentage of 30% that chose SM for their contacts is not in line with the results of the survey carried out for Sheraton Hotels and Resorts, according to that more than 60% of young travellers use social media to stay in touch with family and friends while travelling (e-tid.com, 2010).

B. Young travellers were also asked to indicate if they are visiting their profile to communicate and share with friends their experiences during the voyage. 107 users (42%) from 254 replied positively and respectively 147 young people (58%) gave a negative answer.

Although the survey has shown that 30% of youth use SM regarding its communication during the trip, the rate of young people who visit their profile in order to communicate and share experiences with their friends during the journey, is higher (42%) and a little bit diversified. However, it's considered significant proportion taking into account that Internet access is not always possible when the travellers are "on the road". Although 38% of the survey's sample has a mobile device (mobile phone, tablet pc), for their navigation in SM, the roaming charges still remain high, although efforts are made to reduce, as new ICT applications for travellers entering continuously in the tourism market. Besides, ITB Berlin Convention report of 2011 notes that more and more travellers are starting to use their smart phones to manage their entire travel experience, from information and booking, through use at the destination to post-trip activities and people are becoming 'social travellers', using online social networks while on holiday (ITB World Travel Trends Report 2011/2012 **Error! Reference source not found. Error! Reference source not found.**).

### 5th Section

It provides information regarding the post of travel material (photos, video, experiences, recommendations, etc.) on the users' profile in SM when the travel has been concluded. From

the 254 young people, a satisfactory rate of 74% (187 people) said that shared photos etc. with other users on its profile, while 26% (67 people) responded negatively.

Maybe this is due to the factors of personality. Specifically, Wang and Fesenmaier (2003) examined if and how members' active personality influences their level of actual contributions to the online travel community. The results showed that people with active personalities were more likely to have higher levels of contributions to the online community compared with people who have less active personalities. Qualman (2009) also state that the youngest the generation, the less concerned they are about privacy.

## CONCLUSIONS

The philosophy of social networking based mainly on rapid dissemination of information across the world, with the active participation of users, who have the opportunity to exchange or share an idea, a thought, a message, an opinion in a way of one to many users in real time. This method of communication called on-line oral communication or e-Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and is considered the core for any on-line action or activity. As Qualman (2009) states Word of Mouth goes World of Mouth, as well as, that we have shifted from a world where the information and news was held by a few and distributed to millions, to a world where the information is held by millions and distributed to a few (niche markets). In the framework of extending social networking, tourism claims its position in internet world through the effort to approach potential travellers in their virtual environment in every way. Since Social Media concentrate endless information including many useless ones, the tourism industry is invited to make best possible use of this space.

An advertisement in the SM cannot be effective if it is not supported and disseminated at the same time by users. In the context of promotion on one hand and the qualitative content of an idea promoted on other hand, innovation is an important factor can increase user's interest and at a later stage to make him promoter of idea, creating a chain reaction with other users. Until recently the tourism agency was first on the travellers' preferences due to consultative role and personal contact with customers. Now, the customers and potential travellers tend to receive information about their destination, by people who have already visited a place, since their opinion is impartial by commercial interests.

It is now more clear that the everyday life of young people is affected by Internet and SM is increasingly gaining ground in their activities. The importance of youth tourism and SM as a field of interest for policymakers and researchers leads the tourism industry to realize the needs of young people through this change and respond to this challenge with strong presence in SM world. Instead of methods of aggressive marketing through products and services sale centers, tourism market create places for exchange of views, advices, audio-visual material and anything that will attract the traveller and will familiarise him with the philosophy of travel. In this way the promotion of tourist products and services becomes smoothly. However, lack of sufficient scientific references indicate that SM and Youth tourism are still at an early stage in Greece. Therefore, although young people spend much time for their activities in SM, the rates of influence in their tourist behaviour is not as high as those of relative researches in abroad. This finding is not necessarily negative, since the presence of portal and travel magazines, travel agency are being felt more and more in SM.

It has also been noted that users are more positive to add to their contacts travel portals and magazines than commercial enterprises, because their environment is more friendly and familiar to the user. Moreover, these kinds of SM cultivate a travel climate that often leads the user to make a trip. After all, the results of this survey showed that the percentage of young people (35%) who choose to add to their contacts pages travel content, about half of them have organized their trip through these pages, and more than half make use an offer by travel company. Furthermore, a percentage of 27% visit pages of National Tourism Organisations in

SM. Also, high rates concentrate the young people, who: organize their trip influenced by audiovisual material that is uploaded to their friends profile (69%), visit friends from SM in their country or abroad (40%), visit their profile during their travel to communicate and share experiences with their friends (42%) and finally, post experiences, impressions, or audiovisual material on their profile, after their return from a journey (74%).

At a time that SM are a virtual place for action, where there is the possibility to be coordinated in short time thousands of users with a common aim, such as demonstrations against the economic crisis, it becomes clear the undisputed power of SM which makes them centers of expression, exchange views and decisions. Since the young people are the main team of SM users, the tourism industry make efforts to become gradually part of this young's activity, forcing significant changes to traditional style of tourism sector, which must be based initially on the study of young person's needs and its official integration in tourist market as a niche market.

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