

## PROMOTING AGROTOURISM THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

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***Abstract:** Agrotouristic promotion is going through a process of refinement and adaptation, having to act appropriately with its strategies by positioning between a product with complex characteristics in the continuous development, a consumer with a diverse motivation and a strong elasticity of demand, in the conditions of a Market that bears continuous transformation. Therefore, the development of the communication strategy at the level of the tourism industry, its integration into the global strategy, the designing of a promotional mix that makes efficient use of the promotional tools, is a premise for coordinated, coherent, interdependent actions in this area, essential for a tour operator. In this paper we put accent on the importance of strategies used in promoting agrotourism especially the impact of social media.*

***Key words:** promotion, agrotourism, social media, communication*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism promotion consists in a set of communication approaches aimed at permanently transmitting messages which inform potential customers and tour operators on the characteristics of the products and services offered for sale. They aim to strengthen a positive image and to cultivate a positive attitude towards the company, namely to determine modifications convenient to the bidding company in the mentality and purchase and consumption habits of the tourists.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In addition to the already classic methods such as: travel agency promotion, personalized travel guides (catalogues), a relatively new method of promotion, namely internet promotion, is starting to get more popular. At first, only large companies, major hotels, hotel chains had websites, but with the penetration of the internet into our daily lives, more and more economic agents have realized the importance of their presence in this virtual space.[2]

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We present the most modern and important communication strategies used nowadays in agrotourism, social media.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

In addition to the classic methods used in promotion, economic agents have realized the great importance and impact of social media.

As the importance of social networks grows, many branches of the agrotourism industry begin to see its power of influence. Having a Facebook account as a company has proven to be mandatory nowadays, and many of them are now fighting for a better position in the online environment. [3]

Social networks can provide considerable benefits regarding communication and the relationship with users and also learning advantages and the participation in online learning courses.[1]

Social networks also refer to a category of online applications that help connect friends, business partners and groups of interest. Social relationships are described in the social networking theory in terms of links and knots. Knots are represented by individual network actors, and the links are the relationships between these.[1]

Facebook is one of the most used social platforms and at the same time one that is underestimated and underused among the promotional platforms.[6]

It has become important and even fashionable and many businesses have discovered its benefits. In order to enter this market it is not difficult at all and the potential for promotion is immense. This has proved to be a major communication vehicle that spreads over regions like the flash of lightning. Likewise, Facebook has not only changed the way of communication, but also has a major influence in the world on tourism and travel.[3]

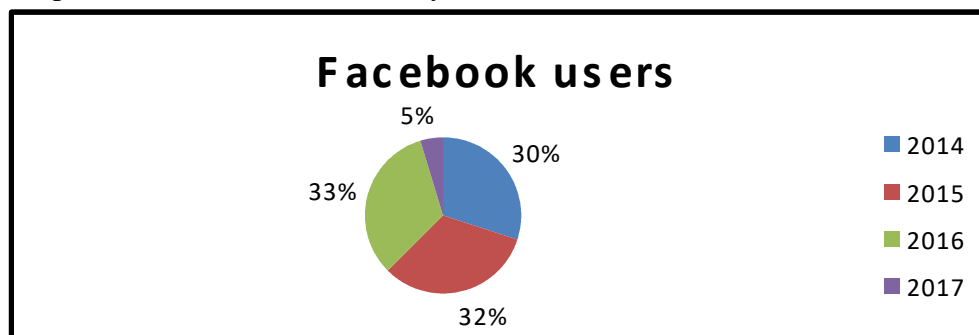
Social networks represent an area that is developing very fast. Therefore, it is very important for almost every business field to take advantage of the benefits that social networks provide as part of the marketing strategy. These tools facilitate communication with customers and potential customers. Especially in the tourism sector, where a large amount of potential visitors start searching for information on the internet before booking a place. [2]

Among the main online marketing operators' objectives is promotion, which directly targets people's interest. Tourists use Facebook to discuss where to go, what attractions they can see, or what restaurants they visit. The general public is the best promotion tool that agrotourism has to offer.[4]

In addition to providing information, Facebook allows tourists to freely express their views on the services provided by touristic units.[4]

A positive effect is represented by the company's ratings and especially the ratings on the company's Facebook profile. Consumers can give marks for the units they visited and exchange experiences and impressions. [4]

According to the website FACEBRANDS.RO, the number of Facebook user accounts in Romania increased by 15.66% in 2016, reaching 9.6 million user accounts at the beginning of 2017 compared to 8.3 million in January 2016.[5]



**Figure 1. Number of Facebook users in Romania**

In 2015 in Romania there were 8.2 million Facebook user accounts, and in 2014 there were 7.6 million. In the following figure is represented in percent, the increase of Facebook accounts in Romania. (Chart 1) [5]

Facebook is one of the most dynamic and interactive tools in the current environment, and it expects further consolidation of its position in the upcoming years. Every PR man knows he can not miss his presence on social networks. [5]

A Facebook promotion method is found in links. The links are the most effective in terms of response rates. Be it a targeted or direct advert, the ad appears strictly to those interested in the promoted services.[1]

. The presence of social networking companies can help develop brand identity, direct marketing, e-commerce, customer assistance, content publishing (regularly publishing content of interest to bring visitors to the profile). In turn, the success of the profile also depends on its promotion, either in traditional (off-line) ways or by using the techniques of communication specific to the virtual environment (online).[6]

According to ETRAVEL AWARDS, in 2016, "Best Guest House Website" site was awarded as one of the most efficient and innovative projects in the online tourism industry in Romania.[4]

Promotional methods can be free of charge: search engines, directories, discussion lists, forums, chats, banner and link exchange, or pay-per-view: links, sponsorships, banners of all kinds, newsletters etc. The attractiveness of the profile is a major requirement for success, along with the ease of access to the desired information, rule number two being determined by the continuous updating the information posted.[2]

The key issue is the effectiveness of the promotion act, namely the choice of that method with the greatest impact on the public. In this sense commercial advertising practices suggest that the message follows three general objectives:[6]

- drawing attention, in a world of an excess of visual information, your own message is competing with many other messages and distracting factors, that's why the most appropriate method of recommending one's own message to the other has to be found;[6]

- getting attention, once the message has been read / received once, it must contain elements that arouse the desire to return to the message;[6]

- convincing the reader, determining the reader to move to the desired action.[6]

However, in order to be reminded of a site or an agrotourism page, it must be more and more active and creative, to deliver essential and concise messages that keep active attention. Also, in the field of agrotourism, photography plays a very important role, so it is recommended that any advertising announcement be accompanied by a significant image.[2]

By looking at specialty literature and analyzing the current stage of promoting agrotourism products and services, we can say that we have discovered a number of advantages and disadvantages as follows( Table 1) :[1]

Among the most important promotion pages are: PHARMACY INNOVATION MKT & IT, THE MARKERS, WEB MAGNAT, BEST BUSINESS and FACEBOOK ads.

Agrotourism's rank is the 9th among the most popular Facebook ads, according to the "Media Page". [5]

Basically, the use of Facebook in its various ways of expression determines a level of access that can lead to saturation for the user involved in the multimedia reality. From this perspective, the premises of a virtual overbidding of virtual offers are created, resulting in consequences or unfavorable effects, characterized by novelty inaccessibility, the very convenient preference for the established online media. In fact, we assist in developing a user's

one-way interest for a range of online services, depending on the options and conjuncture interests.[4]

**Table 1.**

**Advantages and disadvantages of promotion on social networks**

<b>ADVANTAGES</b>	<b>DISADVANTAGES</b>
- it's a very good way to reach a certain segment of the population, very pretentious, represented by young people;	-the slow development of online payment methods; in Romania there are not so many websites that accept this kind of payment;
- it allows the personalization of messages according to the interests of those who will be exposed;	- reviews, which in many cases don't represent a benefit for agrotouristic companies;
- the amount of information made available to the consumer can be very large;	- online promotion is not that personal interaction with the seller, this can probably affect a positive impression from the customer's side;
- it offers unlimited creative opportunities.	- because of the setting of the agrotouristic location, the lack of phone signal is the most encountered issue.

The influence of social media on human behavior is one of the values and tools of the virtual environment. New media is one of the elements of communication and online interaction in contemporary society.[2]

Facebook represents the core of social media action and has become the most frequently accessed and used online system. This modern means of communication offers many benefits to users either by socializing or by posting useful and accessible information to clients in this virtual environment. [3]

**CONCLUSION**

As a result of several research done on pages that promote agrotourism on Facebook or in the media, I found that most of them hold a lot of followers, and they are even in the order of thousands.

This is only due to the fact that these pages contain all the useful information about agrotouristic guesthouses, but also the disadvantages they have.

One of the priorities of Facebook pages and websites is the possibility of online reservations, which benefit both rural agrotouristic package providers and beneficiaries.

Studies conducted by the Austrian company SEEKDA show that about 85% of travelers get information online, the online room booking number reached about 48% in 2015, and the traditional way of booking agrotouristic packages loses its influence .

Social networks have proved to be a good choice with minimal expense for posting bids and photos free of charge. On the other hand, friends and fans on Facebook save time, change opinions about different destinations, and win prizes for holidays.

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