

## USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS IN THE INTERMEDIATION OF THE TOURISM ACTIVITY

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**Abstract:** *Over the years, information technology, e-commerce and electronic bookings has developed significantly, and this is clear a evidence of facilitating access to goods and services. Online platforms are increasingly used in the field of hotels and air transport, electronic reservation services that comply with legal requirements that have their source in regulations that refer to Internet services, e-commerce and contracting. The advantages of online bookings are the availability of the service 24 of the 24 hours, the flexibility to change the booking details, the confirmation is sent immediately, time saved, and the number of users is unlimited.*

**Key words:** *intermediation, online platforms, tourism, contract, commission*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism in everyday life is based on a universal and active label everywhere. By the presence of the definition given by the World Tourism Organization, tourism refers to the activities of humans which get outside of their common environment or travelled for entertainment, business or any other scopes [1].

The main objective of the World Tourism Organization is to promote and develop tourism to reach goals as economic development, international agreements in terms of peace, respect, legal, religious and human rights and prosperity principles [5].

Tourism is part of a tertiary sector, namely services. These services have a margin of about 70% of the world's gross domestic product, and the growth is considered to be higher than that of the economy recorded in the last decade. There are many countries where the main economic source is given by tourism.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials used in writing this paper consist of specialized courses, specialized papers and web pages. The methods used are legal, namely the formal method, the comparative method, the logical and sociological method, the analytical method. The use of these methods had the role of performing a systematic analysis of the information from the studied sources in order to elaborate the points of view and the conclusions.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Intermediation in commercial activity is a complex action, which includes in its content a lot of legal relationships that are concluded between contract partners with different names and qualities, carried out domestically or internationally.

The concept of intermediation has known a historical evolution, ranging from its classical sense up to its modern principles of the present. The term of intermediation is related to the technical-legal representativeness by which a person named representative, concludes a legitimate paper in the name and on behalf of another individual, named representative, the effects of the concluded legal document will occur directly on the person of the representative.

The participants in legal relationships based on intermediation contracts have different names, depending on the concrete contractual relationship in which they participate. Regardless of the legal figure of each intermediation contract, there is a shared

characteristic of all its forms. The decisive trait, specific to all forms of intermediation is the item of intermediation, that is the actual fact of mediation, through the activity submitted based on the specific intermediation contract in the commercial activity, mediates the conclusion of professional business between partners, in exchange for remuneration.

The specificity of intermediation relies on the strength imparted to the intermediary by the principal for concluding civil and also commercial running, with impact on the principal one [3].

Intermediation is defining the contract document by which the intermediary engages to the client to put him in contact with a third party, in order to conclude a contract. The intermediary is not the presumed of the intermediary parties and is independent of them in the execution of its obligations.

The Internet, social media and mobile devices have changed the way Romanian tourists book their holidays. Nowadays, you find customers mainly in the online environment, rather than at a tourism fair. The Internet is very important for the tourism industry. It shows Romanian tourists the amazing destinations that await them. Social media inspires them and allows them to share their experiences. The tourism sector is an early adopter of digital technologies. Consumer buying behaviour is changing because fast and easy online booking becomes a main sales channel for tourism products [7].

The development of telecommunications and the use of computers has made possible the explosive growth of the Internet and the creation of new technologies that will have a significant influence on tourism activities and services. In the field of tourism, the Internet and information technologies are relevant at all operational, structural and strategic levels because they facilitate the global interaction between suppliers, intermediaries and consumers around the world.

Using the Internet as a marketing tool helps tourism organizations gain benefits in terms of cost reduction, income growth, knowledge base development and customer retention. The Internet has a great potential in this field due to the fact that it is based on the flow of information, accepts multimedia support that is constantly evolving, but also information technologies and systems.

Global distribution systems, along with the Internet, play a decisive role in the international tourism sector, because they connect producers with consumers and tourism products. These systems are capitalized as being the backbone of international information networks, which provide to the tourism operators, travel agencies and tour operators agencies facilities to obtain information, to book and commercialize tourism products [6].

The Booking platform was created by Geert-Jan Bruinsma in 1996 in Amsterdam, later transforming from a small Dutch start-up into one of the world's leading digital tourism companies. Booking's mission is to make exploring the world accessible to everyone. By investing in technologies that eliminate the stressful parts of travels, Booking makes available for millions of travellers memorable experiences, diverse transportation alternatives and awesome accommodations, starting from homes and ending to hotels and so on. Being one of the wider tourism trading platforms in the world, showing a spectrum for well-known brands but also for any size entrepreneurs, Booking allows properties around the globe to have overall exposure and develop their business.

The Booking platform is accessible in 43 different languages, exceeding 28 million stated accommodation units, including more than 6.2 million accommodation units in homes, apartments and other distinct accommodation places. Regardless of the destination or the desired activity, Booking offers non-stop assistance from customer service [2].

At booking.com, you can easily solve travel issues. The site offers you to book hotel rooms, houses, business apartments, trains, flights, buses, rental cars, taxis from the

airport and even meals at the restaurant. It is convenient because a single website allows you to make all the necessary arrangements many months in advance. Moreover, the site has a plus point for business travellers as it also offers accommodation options with free breakfast, parking and Wi-Fi [4].

"Booking.com" entails Booking.com B.V., a limited milestone company of the Netherlands, according to their legislation, having a registered office at: Herengracht 597, 1017 EC, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Booking.com is the owner of the website known as "www.booking.com" and the application, collectively referred to as the "Platform". By means of its platform, Booking.com provides an online facility for reservation through which all accommodation operators, including hoteliers and others, can offer various products and services linked to booking and is available for users for making reservations. Moreover, Booking.com B.V. does not procure or vend reservation products or services, but payment is made directly to the supplier.

A person who makes a reservation using the platform is directly engaged in contractual involvement with the provider to whom the reservation was made, unless otherwise specified. Booking.com disclose the booking details to the appropriate provider and emails a confirmation on behalf of the provider, unless otherwise specified.

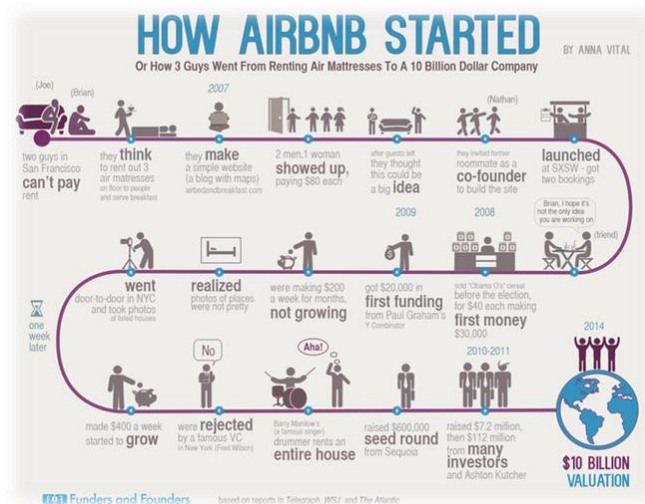
Booking.com may attain various payment prepayment methods of the advance value of the reservation by guests, on the basis of which payments can be performed and handled by bank transfer, credit cards or other online payment methods for and in the name of the supplier. Booking.com may assign a third-party payment processor so that by means of to the Platform to enable payment. Such payments are intended to cause no prejudice in any way to the legal relationship provider - guest [9].

To stay competitive, Booking.com has expanded into the short-term rental market. In May 2019, the company reported that it has over 5.8 million home ads worldwide, generating \$ 2.8 billion meaning 20% of the company's total revenue, from incomes from alternative accommodation in 2018 [10].

In 2008 Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia and Nathan Blecharczyk founded a company in San Francisco named Airbnb, becoming one of the first peer-to-peer facilities specialised in housing. The founders were traveling to a conference in 2007, but were unable to pay for their housing, so two of the founders decided to rent some of their apartments to help pay for the travel costs. This gave them the idea and the founders wanted to change the way people thought about travel. In 2009 they partnered with Y Combinator and expanded their limited offerings. They continued the efforts to expand and raise capital in order to develop their operations internationally through the acquisition of Accoleo. Airbnb now operates in 191 countries and can rent a room, a house or even a castle for one night or more.

Airbnb is located in over 191 countries and continues to expand internationally. They have even managed to establish operations in Cuba and other countries where its legality could be questioned. By doing this, they have created a niche that addresses to travellers, including big spenders, money pliers and everyone in between [8].

The growth from the recent years, recorded by Airbnb, is due to the popularity of some destinations that, initially, the founders of the platform did not even take into account, the emerging countries. By 2030, the World Tourism and Travel Council estimates that the number of tourists arriving in developing countries will be double the number of those visiting advanced economies countries. For Airbnb, emerging countries are a pool where strong communities can grow.

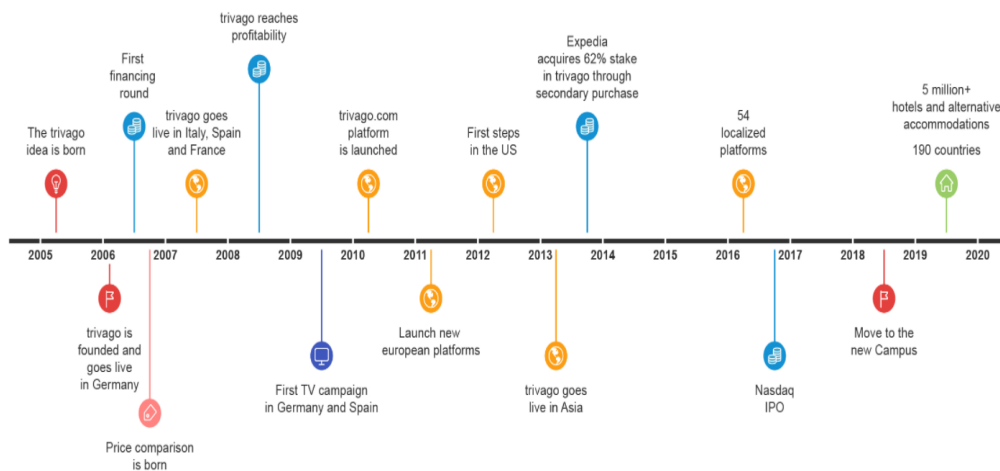


**Figure 1. How Airbnb started**

Source: <https://airbnb370.wordpress.com/history-of-airbnb/> [11]

In recent years, the Airbnb community has expanded globally, but the largest growth has been in Asian countries including the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Currently, over 30% of those who rent their homes through the Airbnb platform are from these states. By 2030, it is estimated that over 400 million tourists will appeal to accommodation in emerging countries, registered on Airbnb [11].

In 2005, in Düsseldorf, 3 German university friends: Rolf Schrömgens, Peter Vinnemeier and Stephan Stubner stand together to conceptualize **Trivago**, the first iteration of the site being performed in a garage, following the model of many start-ups. Since in 2006, Stephan took the decision to be a teacher, Malte Siewert entered into the founding team. Nowadays, CEO Axel Hefer, CFO Matthias Tillmann, CPO James Carter and CPO Anja Honnefelder form the managing team [12].



**Figure 2. About Trivago**

Source: <https://company.trivago.com/our-story/> [15]

Trivago is a worldwide hotel search engine web enabling rapid and easy comparison between hotels and prices based on 1.3 million hotels comprised from 190 countries, and so to identify best deals and prices.

By 2015, Trivago's revenue was over \$ 500 million per year. Up to the month of April of 2016, more than 1,000 people were employed of Trivago, having also another

campus built in Dusseldorf. In the present it is asserted as the primary online hotel search engine, showing more than 120 million visiting monthly.

Trivago lend expertly individual hotel descriptions for each hosting unit registered, featuring high grade keywords for spinning web traffic. It complies other booking reviews from various sites enabling an overall scoring for each hotel or unit.

I should have started with this, but it is less known in Romania. It is a site that searches for a particular hotel on another 200 sites. In this way you can see what is the lowest price available on the internet. You don't buy anything from Trivago, but you are redirected to the site that offers you the price that catches your eye.

Trivago is a meta search engine that compares prices and offers that are provided by numerous online booking sites. From luxury five-star hotels to intimate vacation rentals, the choice of accommodation is endless. The Trivago online platform works with many booking sites around the world, harboring travel agencies, independent and hotel chains [13].

**TripAdvisor** - TripAdvisor was founded in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer and Langley Steinert, and is based in Boston. It is a travel site that provides reviews and other information for consumers about travel destinations around the world. The company is now wide-spread being known by 65 million unique visitors each month, who search the site for reviews of hotels, restaurants and sites around the world.

When setting up TripAdvisor, Kaufer wanted to implement his basic engineering skills and apply them in the vertical travel search. He has built a massive database of travel information to provide a white label search engine for travel sites such as Expedia and Travelocity [14].

TripAdvisor, Inc. is an online travel research company that allows users to plan and have the perfect trip. TripAdvisor's travel research platform provides reviews and opinions of its travellers' community about destinations, accommodation (hotels, guesthouses, special accommodation and holiday rentals), restaurants and activities around the world through its iconic TripAdvisor brand. TripAdvisor commercial sites comprise besides tripadvisor.com in the United States many other site versions from 34 countries and also from China i.e. daodao.com. Beyond the travel-related content, TripAdvisor sites also include links to travel advertisers' sites, allowing travellers to book their travel arrangements directly. In addition to the iconic TripAdvisor brand, TripAdvisor, Inc. manages and operates websites under 21 other travel media brands, linked to the common goal of providing comprehensive travel planning resources in the tourism sector [15].

TripAdvisor is the largest travel guidance platform in the world, giving support to hundreds of millions of humans' monthly for enhancing their experience as traveller in terms of planning, booking and spending a journey. TripAdvisor website and also the app is used by traveller all over the world helping them to find a place to stay or to eat, and even how to spend time based on other people previously travel experience. Endorsing over 884 million reviews and choices from 7.9 million companies, travellers appeal to TripAdvisor to find accommodation, experiences, restaurants and amazing places nearby. This travel guide company is available in 49 markets and 28 languages, and facilitate the choice of and rapid and easy planning for various types of trips [16].

**Agoda** - Agoda is a Singapore-based e-commerce start-up platform established in 2005. As a digital platform, Agoda has grown offering a global network of over 2.5 million properties in over 200 countries and territories around the world. Agoda offers to the travellers' easy access to various luxury hotels, apartments, houses and villas upon all budgets and travel necessities. In 2019, Agoda added a flight product and packages to facilitate travel. Agoda has over 4000 employees in 30 countries, and the mobile application is available in 39 languages [17].

While Agoda is well-known in many Asian markets, the company is now focusing on raising awareness of its brand globally, not an easy thing to do in such a competitive landscape. Agoda aims to reach and attract a mass audience in the US to further establish itself as a travel expert and as a resource for world experience.

Agoda continues to connect on young travellers, speaking simply and authentically and encouraging them to see and experience the world around them. Through its partnership with BuzzFeed, Agoda managed to access and influence the public and encourage these consumers to put down their phones and spend their holidays, providing a world full of opportunities for them [18].

Priceline Group bought Agoda shortly after it was founded, in 2007. In 2011, Agoda set in motion its mobile app for helping its users to perform searches on the go.

Agoda enable security for both business owners and also for users. After performing a reservation, the charge fee is directed to a secure payment, the company ensure the best price offer, assuring that the price is the same as exhibited on other sites or compared to other rates. Agoda's look is alike to their contenders, giving sales to flight and hotel rooms exceeding a million hotel room alternative choices all over the world.

Robert Rosenstein, which has a huge career background created the company intending for a unique website for users interested to book not only a room, but also a flight. He invested in an online hotel business which further became Agoda. Besides, Robert Rosenstein was employed as the Chief Operating Officer for Agoda before accepting the actual position.

The company shows a skilled team of executives with an impressive education and also professional background. The leaders of the company put efforts to support the company come a long way in the last years showing a revenue bouncing into the billions, all based on their previously working experience gathers in other companies, in which their efforts successfully concurred to their expansion [19].

**AloHotels** - In 2011, VacanteReduse.ro was launched, the first exclusively online platform, dedicated to holiday discounts. A 10-year experience in which we interacted with tens of thousands of customers, developed technologies, and reinvented the concept of smart travel. All this time, the travel market has developed continuously. Customer behaviour and expectations have also changed. Travel technologies and platforms involve other challenges, and we in turn have redefined our vision and culture.

Alohotels.ro is a tourist reservation platform, 100% Romanian, where users can search and book thousands of hotels worldwide, including flight packages. AloHotels appeared by taking over the vacantereduse.ro brand, in the fall of 2019. The platform offers to the tourists the opportunity to book their desired hotel, using advanced technology that compares the rates of several global suppliers so that the customer identifies the best rate. We have created a tourist universe, completely digital, beautifully designed and simple, to inspire passionate travellers in discovering traditions and customs from around the world, meeting new people and returning with extraordinary stories. Through the digital platform, we offer tourists the opportunity to book their desired hotel, through a travel technology, which connects in real time, with thousands of hotels and global tour operators from hundreds of domestic and foreign destinations [20].

The AloHotels brand will operate exclusively online through the dedicated platform that allows customers to filter hotels according to the period and services offered. Paid reservations get directly at the hotel, and travel vouchers are available in the customer's account. It remains to be seen whether the new platform communicates in real time with hotel management systems or whether bookings still require fewer automatic confirmations. The platform is also supported by a dedicated call centre, where customers

in doubt can request additional information. In fact, AloHotels Group presents itself as a client company that addresses to online travel booking services.

AloHotels.ro uses the TravelFuse Agregator solution, which facilitates the return in searches of several types of tourists packages, stays with flight and hotels in the given case, from approximately 32 operators in Romania [21].

Brokerage contracts are the necessary acts that are used by tourist service providers and not only, so that the actions they offer and carry out are legal. Tourism, in the future, will become a permanent concern, because over time, it will become a need manifested more and more by modern people. The Internet is an extremely useful tool for creating a long-lasting tourist service and gaining a competitive advantage. Travel agencies need to adopt social networking as a channel in order to use the internet as effectively as possible to communicate with customers. At the same time, today's generation considers the opinions of other customers much more valuable than traditional marketing methods, such as advertising. Moreover, their involvement through online reviews on various platforms, whether written or video, has a huge impact on the market. The growing importance of the Internet for travel planning and understanding of the online field of tourism is vital to identifying potential challenges and solutions for the effective marketing of travel destinations. All these qualities that are brought to the platforms are due to the continuous evolution of technology.

## CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a dynamizing element of the global economic system by driving a constant growth in the production of goods and services sphere with the stimulation of other economic branches, industry, agriculture, transport, which is directly involved in its support and in economic terms.

The practice of tourism presupposes the existence of activities that satisfy the variety of needs appeared during the trip and the stay. Thus, there is a need to transport to the place of stay, accommodation during it, to meet food needs, as well as those that motivated the trip (rest, leisure, spa treatment, business). All these represent the tourist services as an assembly of activities that aim to satisfy the material and spiritual needs of the travelers during the trip and the stay.

The importance of tourist services in the realization of the tourist product is highlighted by elements that highlight the natural and anthropic resources of an area, resorts, making them accessible to tourists (resources will take the form of tourist products only through specific services: transport, accommodation, food, recreation). International experience has shown that the existence of valuable natural and anthropogenic resources is not sufficient to ensure the development of tourism. In the absence of services that enhance them, exceptional resources may remain outside the economic circuit. Through the originality and creativity with which the tourist services are combined with each other and with the other components of the tourist product, it is possible to ensure the increase of the attractiveness and especially the individualization of the tourist products. The heterogeneity, complexity and diversity of tourist services require their grouping into categories that are easy to identify, locate and compare.

The role of tourism in today's society makes the tourism and travel industry one of the essential components of modern economic life. Thus, the spread and importance of the tourism phenomenon determined it to go beyond the strict borders of the economy and to acquire social valences (research on the organization of tourist services corresponds to a strong axis of trade policy and strategies developed by any enterprise). This research aims to mobilize many means in the tourism industry because the direct or indirect contact with

customers, the intangibility of services and the personalization of tourist packages are major features of this field.

Online platforms are on an upward slope as a marketing tool, as they are used by more and more tourist units. With the development of technology, more and more hotel and hostel owners choose to promote their services and offers in the online environment through platforms. Because people are more and more busy and can no longer reach a traditional travel agency, when they want to book a vacation, they turn to the internet. The platforms have a very complex organization just to be easy to use and accessible to all users.

Due to this significant evolution of technology, the online environment has become a kind of "first aid" for most people who are somehow dependent on it, just as tourism is dependent on online platforms. Without these platforms, tourism wouldn't have evolved and wouldn't have reached such a performance, only through traditional travel agencies. All these reasons have led to our evolution as humanity, because due to the advancement of technology, more and more alert, humanity has also had to evolve to keep up with novelty.

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