Romania, as a Tourist Destination, Seen from the Perspective of the Online Media

by
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Abstract. In the age of information, the internet is one of the most often consulted sources when it comes to gathering materials about specific tourist destinations. According to the World Tourism Organization, 80% of young travellers use it to search for information before their trip. Therefore the data available in the online media has a significant impact on the decision-making process of young tourists, and the internet can be used as an essential marketing tool for the tourism industry. This paper presents the in-depth analysis of the information about Romania, as a tourist destination, available on the major non-Romanian websites, which operate in the field of tourism worldwide, including both owner and user generated content. Well acknowledged, online newspapers are also included in the study, together with two significant social media networks, namely Facebook and Twitter. The results show the image, which is presented to the international traveller about Romania as a tourist destination, through the online environment. This research may serve as a starting point for companies or researchers, who plan to develop and implement strategies to promote Romanian tourism by means of the internet to the potential foreign visitors. The novelty of this paper consists in the fact that, very few scientific studies have been conducted for Romania, concerning this or closely related topics.

Key words: online media, Romania, tourist destination, marketing, youth, social media
JEL classification: L83, M31

1 Introduction

The Internet has become an integral part of the daily life, being used by a large part of the population as primary source of information, being used as a way to promote products, services ideas and opinions.(Chitu & Albu 2013) The number of Internet users in 2012 was of 2.4 billion, which means an Internet penetration of 34.3% and it is estimated to reach, a number of 3.4 billion (48% penetration) by 2015 (Kotler, Ph. & Armstrong 2010). The Internet is among the main sources utilised for the pleasure of anticipating and planning impending holidays.(Parrinello 1993) Due to its popularity it has fundamentally reshaped the way tourism related information is distributed and the way people plan for and consume travel (Buhalis & Law 2008).

Since the tourism product is complex and difficult to evaluate, it’s selection requires more abundant, higher quality information (Grant et al. 2007; Zafiropoulos, K. 2012). Therefore, as various research show, before choosing a destination, tourists will search for information to support their decision-making (Fodness & Murray 1998; Grant et al. 2007; Vogt & Fesenmaier 1998) and based on the collected information, tourists will build the image of a destination. Naturally, one is more likely to choose the destination for which they possess a positive destination image (Woodside & Lysonski 1989).

In the past, travellers found tourism information mainly from commercial sources,(Beerli & Martin 2004) and combined them with guidebooks and other destination specific material, news media, or the knowledge passed on directly from family and acquaintances (Fodness & Murray 1998).

Nowadays, leisure tourists have an even wider range of information sources to choose from.

One of the most popular content areas on the Internet is Travel-related information (Schmallegger & Carson 2008; Pan et al. 2007; Werthner & Ricci 2004), and it is argued that information and communication technologies (ICT) may have a considerable and increasing impact on several tourism aspects which include the product supply, information search processes, consumption patterns, and tourism experiences (Buhalis & Law 2008).
The online ITC include so-called social media Websites, representing various forms of consumer-generated content (CGC) such as blogs, forums, virtual communities, wikis, social networks, collaborative tagging, and media sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr, (Pan et al. 2007) together with review sites such as TripAdvisor. It also includes Websites that have non user generated content such as internationally recognized newspapers and local government websites. Many of the above mentioned platforms assist consumers in posting and sharing their travel-related comments, opinions, and personal experiences, which then serve as information for others. (Xiang & Gretzel 2010) Hence, the interactive nature of the web environment allows for deep, nonlinear searches that are initiated and controlled by customers. (Chen et al. 2014) For the first time, the consumer-traveller participates actively, not only as tourists who make use of the tourist product, but also as a critic, having the opportunity to report his opinion or express a need or a desire related to ones experience (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou 2013).

As a result, consumers are increasingly exposed to the online advice of other tourists. (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) Murray found that, in case of services, personal sources are regularly preferred over impersonal sources of information (Fodness & Murray 1998) and that this first-hand knowledge communicated by similar others who do not have commercial interests is seen as being especially useful (Yoo & Gretzel 2011) and highly impacts the tourists’ decisions. (Vermeulen & Seegers 2009; Yoo & Gretzel 2011; Prebensen et al. 2010; Parra-López et al. 2011).

Knowing that the internet is used mostly by persons aged between 15-24 years old (83%) (Wall-street, 2013) it is clear that younger tourists make particularly intensive use of Internet-based networks. (Prensky 2001)

According to recent researches (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou 2013; WTO 2011; TIA 2008) 89% of the young people chose the Internet as first option for planning their trip. Based on the above mentioned situation, the activities in the online media should be part of any tourist related company’s communication strategy and shouldn’t be made randomly (Turismmarket 2013). It seems that current tourism marketing practice focuses attention on utilizing social media to create positive image and word-of-mouth for tourist destinations and businesses, without a solid understanding of the role of social media in online travel information search. (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006)

In order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon of online media, the aim of this paper is to analyze the information about Romania, as a tourist destination, available on the major non-Romanian websites, which operate in the field of tourism worldwide, obtaining this way the country’s destination image, that is presented to the international traveller. The purpose of the research is to serve as a starting point for companies or researchers, who plan to develop and implement strategies to promote Romanian tourism by means of the internet to the potential foreign visitors.

2 Literature review

Understanding the concepts related to the internet and the online media is one of the basic elements in this research. The following part of the paper, will present the main online information sources that will be analyzed in this study.

2.1 Search engines

Search engines are designed to help Web users search for useful and relevant information on the Web. When a Web user types in a certain keyword, search engines will return organic
search results through information retrieval and database techniques making information access more convenient. As a result more and more Web users take search engines as the main entrance to the Web. (Yang & Wang 2014) According to a research conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America 64% of online travelers use search engines for travel planning (TIA, 2008). And it serves as the number one online information source. Thus it defines the practical boundaries of the online tourism domain and dictates the way in which it is represented (Henzinger 2007).

The most popular text-based search engine on the Internet is Google. Currently, it serves the largest percentage of queries (approximately 47.3%) on the Internet, with an index of around 25 billion Web pages and 250 million queries a day (Bertolucci, 2007).

2.2 Social media

Social media can be understood as Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content which contains “media impression created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers” (Blackshaw, 2006). The influence of SM in the daily life of the users has gain the attention of many researchers abroad. Boyd and Ellison 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 related to it. (Boyd, DM & Ellison 2007)

2.2.1 Social networks

Facebook is the most illustrative of social networks not only through its high number of users, but by means of its geographical diffusion as well (Ditoiu & Platon 2012). Studies have suggested that electronic social media such as Facebook and Twitter may be beneficial as a risk-reduction and virtual selection mechanism, as consumers assist each other in effectively making sense of information available on the Web (Brogan & Smith, 2009). These sites are therefore increasingly employed as information channels by tourism organizations (Munar 2011).

2.2.2 Virtual tourist communities and guides

Virtual tourist communities such as LonelyPlanet and IGoUGo, where tourists can exchange opinions and experiences on topics of common interests, have been around at least since the late 1990s, and several researchers have investigated their roles and impacts in the context of travel. Nowadays being the primary platforms for online travelers to share their experiences. As evidenced by the success of Websites like tripadvisor.com, online travel-related consumer reviews also represent a significant amount of social media for travel purposes (Vermeulen & Seegers 2009; Yoo & Gretzel 2008)

2.2.3 Blogs and forums

Recently, personal blogs have become an important source for acquiring travel information (Lin & Huang 2006; Litvin et al. 2008; Singh et al. 2008; Yoo & Gretzel 2011) playing a relevant role in defining the image of a destination. (Choi et al. 2007) With personal blogs, many tourists can share their travel experiences with others and potential tourists can search for and respond to others’ experiences. (Yoo & Gretzel 2011) (Yoo & Gretzel, 2012). They are particularly useful in the anticipatory and reflective phases of tourist experience (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009).

In this decision phase, forums are also often used to post questions, in order to gather information and get advices regarding the desired tourist destinations. An online forum can be defined as a Web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content in a specific domain, such as sports, recreation, techniques, and travel. People participating in an online forum may cultivate social bonds, and interest groups for a particular topic may form.
from the discussions. (Chen et al. 2006) The most important benefit of online forums is that individual users can receive tailored answers from peers after formulating problems in their own words, without using specific keywords to search online. (Steehouder 2002)
In this regard, a blogs and forums can be seen as a social medium that carries user generated content for word of mouth (WOM) distribution (Xiang & Gretzel 2010) and posts may represent a type of written WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) “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.(Litvin et al. 2008)
The influence of both positive and negative aspects of classical WOM in tourism products and the significant role that it played as information source in travel and tourism was first studied by Westbrook (Westbrook & Westbrook 1987) Positive WOM was found to increase purchase intention by creating a favorable brand image and reducing risk perception (Jeong & Jang 2011).

2.3 Online newspapers

Online news reading has become very popular as the Internet provides access to news from millions of sources all over the world.(Cleger-Tamayo et al. 2012) Destination information originates not only from people returning from their trips, newspapers and magazines regularly include tourism supplements and travelogues, and travel reports are increasingly shown on television. (Jacobsen & Munar 2012) Therefore the news published in these online newspapers also serve as an important information source for tourist and the events related to a certain place can influence the overall destination image and the decision-making process.

2.4 Credibility and trust

According to Xiang and Gretzel, virtual tourist communities such as LonelyPlanet and IGoUGo are the primary platforms for online travelers to share their experiences followed by consumer review sites representing about 27% of all social media sites. Personal blogs and forums also represent a substantial part of social media (15%) retrieved by Google in the context of travel information search. These three categories, in combination, constitute over 80% of social media represented in Google. In addition, there are social networking sites and media sharing sites, representing 9% (Xiang & Gretzel 2010).
Most tourism enterprises, national tourism organisations and local destination marketing organisations disseminate considerable amounts of information, increasingly through the Internet.(Jacobsen & Munar 2012) However, research shows that nearly 73% of people are not visiting the sites of National Tourism Organisations and sites with content generated by them. In contrast, almost 69% of the population enjoys watching friends’ profile and especially the posts uploaded and nearly 6/10 report that are affected by users’ videos.(Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou 2013)
Therefore the degree of trust in the information provided by social networks is considered to be more reliable then In case of online word-of-mouth because the information comes from known sources, such as one’s friends on the network, as opposed to the ones where the source is unknown. (Ditoiu & Platon 2012)

3 Research methodology

For the research the data was collected from a number of 28 websites. These include 7 forums, the 2 most well known social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, 3 websites of foreign governments, 5 online news websites, 1 blog, 4 virtual travel communities and 6 online tourist guide websites, totalling more than 160 web pages, 2175 posts, and 5100 social network comments. The data was then categorized in
groups based on the structure of the text, obtaining 3 categories: Forums, Social networks, and Tourism website. The later contains the websites of foreign governments, the online news websites, the blog, the virtual travel communities and the online tourist guide websites. Throughout the paper it will be referred to them as so.

The selection of the websites was made based on the order in which they appeared in Google for the keywords “Romania” and “tourism”. Google was chosen as search engine because it represents the current state-of-the-art online search technology, and it is highly popular among Internet users and dominant in the online search market. (Xiang & Gretzel 2010) The results from the first 3 pages in Google were included in the research, because, according to previous researches, the majority of search engine users will only review search results in the first three pages. (Spink & Jansen 2004). Knowing that people tend to trust less websites of local organizations, (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou 2013) only websites with non Romanian content were taken into account.

In order to get a basic understanding of this topic, the first 3 websites were analyzed, after which the entire data was processed using NVIVO qualitative data analysis. The overall image was built up based on two categories of keywords, positive (e.g. good, happy, satisfied, wonderful, recommend, etc...), and negative (e.g. bad, horrible, never, ugly, dangerous, etc...), obtaining this way, the description of both aspects regarding Romania as a tourist destination.

4 Results

The study is built on three steps, as mentioned before. First one presents the in depth analysis of the first three websites that appear in Google, followed by analysing the most frequently occurring words from the entire collected data. Finally, the negative and positive keyword analysis is conducted.

4.1 Analysis of specific websites

The first website to be listed by Google is lonelyplanet.com. The main page presents the most well known tourist attraction from Romania, namely the Bran (Dracula’s) Castle, 3 major cities, (Sibiu, Brasov and Bucharest) together with accommodation suggestions and the main most important things one needs to know when visiting Transylvania.

When searching from the homepage of lonelyplanet.com, for the keyword “Romania”, after the description of Transylvania the second article is related to the story of a young journalist who was robbed on the train from Bucharest to Brasov, describing the event in full detail.

The legend of Dracula is one of the most promoted stories, and is related to the Bran Castle as one of the main tourist attractions; however, other castles are also mentioned, such as Peles and Poienari Castle. Romania is presented as the country with natural lands fact that also implies that the infrastructure is poor and the transportation slow. The only exception from this is the Transfagarasan road that is described as one of the best “highways” that also provides an outstanding view. Other promoted attractions are the Bear Lake and Ocna Sibiului, the molettes in Covasna, Monasteries in Bucovina, museums, and the Danube Delta. Main cities to be mentioned and recommended as city tours, are Bucharest, Sibiu, Brasov, Sighisoara and Sinaia. The latter four are described as very safe cities.

Regarding the health and safety issues, the greatest danger is represented by robbers and stray dogs. However other diseases such as hepatitis, bird flu and Tick bites are also mentioned.

Most of the entertainment places consist of bars and pubs, followed by the Romanian, opera, theatre and football stadiums. The most promoted activities are mountain related, such as tracking, hiking and caving, however boat trips in the Danube Delta, spending life with shepherds and taking mud baths in Techirghiol are also attractive ways to spend the time.
With relation to event tourism, the theatre festivals and jazz festivals are described, together with typically local celebrations, such as Sambra oilor, Mayfest and Plai. For young tourists, the Peninsula festival also represents high importance. The website however associates Romania directly with Moldavia thus providing information about Moldavia also. Opposed to the mildly negative aspects presented by the website, in the forum part of lonelyplanet.com, Romania is presented in a more positive way. The experiences of foreigners that have travelled in this country, describe it as a safe and wonderful place. The opinions of people posting in the forum are very good, and have several recommendations to potential tourists who are intending to visit Romania. According to the reports of some people, the roads are acceptable, robbers don't represent a danger and neither do the stray dogs. It is easy to exchange money and the prices are affordable. Among the promoted cities there are Brasov, Rasnov, Bran, Bucharest, Sibiu, Sighisoara, Fagarasi, Curtea de Arges Medias Targu Mures Viseu de sus Gura Humorului and Piatra Neamt.

As places of great interest there were mentioned the Monasteries in Bucovina, the countryside, natural lands, Cota 2000 in Sinaia, Transfagarasan, Balea Cascada, and the Bucegi Mountains, while the main recommended activities are hiking tours, skiing, and tracking. Wikitravel.org is the second result in Google, and describes Romania in a pleasant way, putting an emphasis on the countries landscapes and cultural heritage. It presents 9 regions of the country underlining the main touristic attractions, of each in a general way. The main sites suggested are very similar to the ones suggested on Lonelyplanet, adding Constanta, Timisoara and Suceava. As attractions, the Black Sea, Poiana Brasov Ski resort, Baile Herculane, and Vatra Dornei are mentioned in addition. Regarding the transportation to and in the country, a very good description of the airports, flight, trains, and buses is given, with specification of the fares, train types and ticketing details. The same detailed description is applied to the traffic, and travelling by car also, mentioning details such as bad traffic, crowded roads, legislation regarding alcohol consumption while driving, and rules that apply in case of accidents. In order to have specific knowledge about the allowed speed rate, the typology of roads and the allowed speed on each of them is specified. In the case of travelling with a taxi, approximate rates are given, together with specific and realistic description of how to choose the car, and also how to monitor the price of the fare. Locations that may represent problems, such as the train station or airport are also specified. Another method for getting around is mentioned to be hitchhiking, which is described as not being dangerous, and as a foreigner one must not pay for the trip, due to the kindness of Romanians, that are keen to show foreigners around. The mentioned tourist attractions include the Turda salt mine, and the Casino in Constanta, together with the suggestion of visiting churches due to Romania's religiosity population.

A very detailed and accurate description of exchanging money is also given, explaining the way in which to select the exchange office. Regarding the prices, luxuries and accommodation is considered expensive, however transportation, food, some restaurants, and bars are cheap. Regarding food, it is recommended to buy it from the farmer's market, and some of the main traditional Romanian dishes are also presented. Accommodation can be easily found, and it is recommended to book on site, not with travel agencies, receiving this way better prices. Safety is acceptable, given that the tourist is vigilant, therefore the website provides some useful recommendations, such as: beware of dark streets, avoid gypsies, and supervise your belongings. Regarding the healthcare, the hospitals are presented to be highly uncomfortable; however the dental care is of excellent quality. Other information, such as good mobile phone coverage, fast internet access and cable access is also provided.
In the wikiTravel forum, some of the tourists relate that relatives were beaten into coma in Romania, and that the description in the articles found in the guide is not realistic, therefore, not helpful for the tourists.

Regarding corruption, the writers have a very bad opinion, stating that corruption is very high, and presenting from their own experience cases in which they or friends of theirs were forced to bribe policemen. Other travellers however contradict the above mentioned details, and state that Romanian is wonderful, and not as dangerous as described. Regarding the taxi fares, one tourist confirmed the problem of being taken advantage of them by the driver and being forced to pay triple the normal fare price.

The tripadvisor website, is based on the experience of other tourist who already visited the region. Therefore the forum is the main page that appears when searching for information about Romania, and at a first glance it presents the question, and suggestions that are asked by tourists who are intending to visit the country. The topics are more specific for each city that the future visitor is travelling to and the most of them are about Bucharest, however Constanta, Brasov, Hunedoara, Tulcea, Targu Mures, Sinaia and Oradea are also mentioned. Some of the discussions arise from the bad reputation of taxi drivers having the conclusion that the best is to travel by bus.

### 4.2 Word frequency analysis

The first step in analyzing the content is establishing the most frequently used words that are relevant in the case of the study. According to table 1, when taking into consideration all the sources, the most used words are Romania(s) and Romanian(s), which is a logical phenomenon, given that the whole research topic revolves around this world. The third most mentioned word is “photo” which is used mainly in the social media, where numerous photos are posted, and the words most frequently connected to it is “beauty” and “beautiful”. As a result this word is the 8th most commonly used.

The reference regarding “people” is mostly used as the noun to address to the individuals with whom the conversation is being held, or who are the subjects of the conversation. It is also often used in describing the persons living in Romania.

#### Table 1: Word frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Weighted Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Romania(s)</td>
<td>3025</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Romanian(s)</td>
<td>1714</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo(s)</td>
<td>1272</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>People(s)</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Like(ing)</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Know</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>See(ing)</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mountain(s)</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Visit(s)</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Travel(s)</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>0.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>World(s)</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Castle(s)</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Evening(s)</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At a first glance the term “like(ing)” may give the impression that it refers to the preference of the tourists, however, in most of the situations it is used to make a connection between comparisons, therefore not being very relevant in the case of this study.

The most commonly mentioned city is the capital, Bucharest, to which it is referred to as the main connecting point between the other cities being the place where most tourist arrive and start their visit from, or the destination from where they departure by plane. From the
Touristic point of view it is described by some as nice and beautiful, with impressive architecture, (the Atheneum and the Parlament) while others consider that the combination of architectural styles throughout the city is inadequate. The opera and theatre can be a good way to pass the day, after which the tourists can enjoy the active nightlife. It is mentioned as being “little Paris” and as a city with a lot of history, and big shopping centres. As negative aspects, the dangerous taxies, the stray dogs, the gypsies and the high density of traffic is mentioned, being pointed out that it is not the nicest city in Romania.

The word “Country” is used as a synonym for Romania, therefore its frequency can be added to this.

After Bucharest the most often used word that describes a location from Romania is “Transylvania”. It is mentioned as the most recommended place to visit with several touristic sites, Saxon villages, medieval cities and impressive landscapes. However, several discussions and debates are held, regarding the history of this territory in relation to the Second World War. It is the home of Dracula (vampires) of its castle, and various other castles that are worth seeing. It is also known for its fortified churches, gothic architecture, as the “land between the Carpathians” and as the place visited by Prince Charles. The presence of Hungarian minority is mentioned, and in some cases it is referred to them as being in conflict with Romanians. The most often remarked cities are Sibiu, Brasov, Sighisoara and Bran. Almost all the references to Transylvania are positive, the Roma population being the only negative one.

Further on, the weight of each word frequency in the total content for the various data sources was analysed in order to observe how the results in each case differs from the frequencies identified in the other sources.

According to figure 1, the first two words appear very frequently in all the sources, while the third one is used often only in the case of Social Media websites, and seldom in case of the other two. This occurrence is usual, due to the nature of social networks. Words like Mountains and churches are also mentioned often in the conversations on this platform. Photos are available also on Tourist sites however their frequency is significantly smaller than in case of the social networks. The most people talk about Bucharest in the forums and the word “good” has also a higher weight in the total discussions conducted here than in case of other sources, while mountains and churches are not mentioned as often as in the other cases. Tourist sites refer to cities more often than the other two; however the word “good” is mentioned the least often.

Figure 1. Distribution of weight percentages of the most frequently used words among the data sources

4.3 Keyword analysis
After analysing the content based on the positive keywords it was found that the positive information is mostly related to the untouched nature, beautiful countryside, rich wildlife, (Saxon) villages where “time stood still”, folk craft, rich cultural heritage, and great hospitality. The people are described as being wonderful and friendly always willing to help. However most of them don’t speak many foreign languages and tourists are recommended to learn some basic phrases in Romanian.

As for tourist attractions, the charming medieval towns, castles, wooden churches, and painted monasteries are often mentioned. In the category of events, the Christmas fare in Sibiu was pointed out. Regarding Food and drinks, the food is stated to be very delicious and healthy while the alcoholic drinks are mostly cheap. A great emphasis is placed on the beer, the red wine and the wine making regions. The cities have a good nightlife being recommended especially for young people travelling on a budget.

The information presented on tourism related websites and on tourist communities, is built up in a formal and professional way, and it is mostly documented.

Based on the information gather from the forums, Romania is most known and appreciated for the beautiful women that live in the country, followed by fans of the Legend of Dracula and he’s castle. The friendliness of locals is also much appreciated however, many people state that Romanians are either very good or very bad. Just like on tourist websites, the nature, culture, and rural life, especially the one from Transylvania, is very well seen, and is one of the main highlighted advantages of the country. Manny mentioned also about the historical cities like Sibiu and Sighisoara and the fascinating architecture available there. The most recommended way to visit is by car, and the main activities mentioned are hiking, mountain climbing, and cycling.

Here it is also mentioned that the food is natural and very delicious. Previous visitors, were pleasantly surprised by the country and many of them stated that they are interested in visiting again, and that they are also recommending it to other tourists as well.

The content from the social networks has the most positive adjectives, and based on the comments, Romania is depicted in a very positive way. Many people who know the country present their point of view and recommend others to visit it. A large amount of information is presented about the touristic sites together with very appealing photos. To the information that was already discussed in the previous sources it is also added the favourable weather conditions (4 seasons) and that despite of the rumours it is a safe country. This statement is backed up, by some of tourist websites as well. An interesting attraction is also mention here, which consists in living with the shapers for a few days and getting to know their lifestyle.

It is also important to mention that the conversations are not based on very well documented data and are highly subjective. In the forums, when analysing the data based on the negative keywords, the most criticized aspect of Romania are the gypsies, and many people associate them directly with Romanians. Closely linked to this is the fear of being robbed, cheated on, or even hurt. It is also mentioned by several foreigners that in their country most Romanians are thieves or beggars, and some of them are very rude and also violent. Based on this they formed a bad opinion about the country. Romania was also described as a sad place with huge corruption a bad government, low quality services, no public safety, poverty, lack of public order, many orphans and child abuse. Therefore it was concluded that it is not a very well developed country that has unreliable healthcare and bad infrastructure. The problem of the potholes in the road and the lack of road signs were also pointed out. Regarding touristic attractions, it was stated that the seacoast is poorly maintained and is very expensive, while some cities (Bucharest Targu Jiu) are considered ugly. Another issue assessed, was the fear of stray dogs, while in Bucharest many tourist
complained that they had been scammed by taxi drives. Overall, many stated that the bad characteristics overweight the good ones, and that one should never visit the country.

The various government sites together with online travel guides prevent the travellers about the non-reliable health care system, dog attacks that can result in rabies if bitten, the risk of being overcharged by taxi drivers, bar fights in rural places and tourists are advised to take care of their belongings, and avoid gypsies.

The high level of corruption is also pointed out together with describing in detail cases of robberies.

To the characteristics described about the roads in the forums, it is also added the fact that they are badly lit, one can find double parked cars, horse-drawn carts, very few maps and that Romanian drivers are dangerous.

The prices are high in some of the restaurants in Bucharest, the sea resort is expensive, given the conditions it provides, and the ski stations is also overprices in relation to the poor quality services that it offers.

Compared to the other sources, the negative elements that are mentioned on the Social networks are significantly fever. However the problem of high pitched taxi prices, the stray dogs, the corruption, the crowded city life is discussed here as well. Other elements such as cruelty towards abandoned animals, no concern for the environment, lack of touristic info points, and lack of guidebooks are added to the list.

When studying the knowledge of foreigners about Romania, the most common information regarding the country is Dracula and vampires, followed by the aspects regarding gypsies and the negative features related to beggars, stealing and the lack of safety. The most known persons are Ceausescu, Hagi and Nadia Comaneci; however most of them refer to her as “the gymnast who got the first perfect 10”. It was also mentioned that Romanian is a Latin language, the country is shaped like a fish, and it has high speed internet.

Based on the analysed discussions, it can be noted that most of the foreigners who never visited Romania have a very poor knowledge about it, while some of them have no knowledge at all.

As the intersection between the good and bad characteristics of the country, many argue that the negative features can’t be applied on all of the country and on all of Romanians, together with the fact that it is not correct to generalise based on the people who moved abroad and have there a bad reputation. Others point out that the positive aspects are spoiled by the very negative image that the country has.

5 Conclusions

Taking into account all the analyses data sources, the most appreciated aspects of Romania are the natural sight, the historical cities, the rural areas and the food prepared with natural ingredients. The story of Dracula is also well known, and most of the tourists are motivated to visit the country because of this.

Photos posted in the Social networks are very efficient in promoting the touristic sites from Romania and they have a very positive impact on the viewers.

The most negative aspects revolve around the fact that foreigners don’t consider Romania to be a safe county to visit. They are concerned about the gypsies that might steal their belongings, take advantage of them, or even do them harm, furthermore, some of them associate Romanians with Romas.

Other issues, presented mainly by local government websites, and virtual guidebooks, are the stray dogs, the danger of being scammed by taxi drivers, and the problem of the roads which have potholes and lack road signs.

These negative features are mostly presented by people who haven’t visited the country and have very little knowledge about it. Most of the tourist who have visited Romania were pleased with their experience and are spreading good word of mouth about it. They also recognize and admit the existence of the negative aspects, however, as a tourist, they don’t consider them to be as problematic as some present them to be.

With the adequate pre-travel information
gathering and if one knows what to expect for, the tourist experience in Romania will be very pleasant and satisfactory.

According to this research, when promoting Romania as a tourist destination, companies should put a great emphasis on clarifying the safety issues, while disseminating the information about the country’s touristic attractions using photograph and guidebooks.

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