Universitat de les
Illes Balears

Facultat de Turisme

The Impact of Social Media in Tourism

Ana Mª Plaza Vich

Grau de Turisme

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DNI de l'alumne: 43235266G

Treball tutelat per Lara Ezquerra Guerra
Departament de Organització d'Empreses

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Abstract

The following research is based on the relationship that exists between the tourism industry and social media.
Social media is currently playing an important role in the tourism sector, especially with the arrival of the Internet, simultaneously affecting consumers and suppliers.
In the first part, the evolution of tourism, its history and tourism in the present with recent figures, is explained. Afterwards, the second part focuses on the definition and the evolution of social media explaining the most important platforms. Eventually, the relationship between social media and tourism, and the existing important impacts that affect and change somehow the way demand and supply behave are elucidated.

The main findings of the dissertation are in the first place to state the important changes that the tourism sector has experienced throughout history. However, the biggest impact that the tourism industry above anything else has been facing is the Internet, related with the second conclusion, which is to give evidence of the significance of online promotion tools thanks to social media like the online platforms, which facilitate the interaction between consumers and suppliers reinforcing the current people's desire for travelling and consuming.

1. Introduction

"Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited".
(UNWTO,1993)

From the definition of tourism, we can derive that is an important sector for the economy which affects and is affected by different subjects.

It can be assumed that tourism is considered the most important commercial activity in the world. In 1995, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), affirmed that the touristic activity generated more than three trillion of dollars (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2020), the travel and tourism sector experienced 3,5% growth, outpacing that of the global economy (2,5%) for the ninth consecutive year in 2019.
WTTC works to raise awareness of travel and tourism as one of the world's largest economic sectors, supporting one in ten jobs (330 million) worldwide, and generating 10,3% of global GDP.
With its pluses and minuses, the studies have demonstrated that tourism is present in our lives because it can be related to value and pleasure.

However, it should be mentioned that tourism has been recently affected, especially, by a huge phenomenon in this research will be emphasised called cyberspace or as we all know, the Internet.

In the 1990s, since the Internet emerged in our lives, everything has changed.

The idea of practising tourism with just one click suddenly changed the tourism and hospitality industry.
For example, the studies of Mamaghani (2009) affirm that 95 per cent of users use the online websites to make travel research.

Most of the people adapted to the digital age, being more simple to find information, stay updated and start their new adventures searching and buying their trips via online.
"Most airline tickets are bought directly online on airline websites, through third-party websites (TPWs) such as Expedia, on auction websites such as Priceline, and on generic Internet search engines such as Google" (Toh, DeKay, & Raven, 2012, p.81).

The new technologies, more specifically the Internet and the arrival of social media, have completely changed the way people organize their trips or holidays. This evolution, including access to intelligent devices, allows using websites, platforms, apps…to obtain all kind of information and reach easily to our desired product or service.

But the tourism sector is not only affected by new technologies, also by the economy, culture, environment and social changes.

Supply and demand also interact in different ways to offer or get new experiences, better products or services in an efficient and faster manner.
The role that social media is currently playing creates an important impact both on travellers and suppliers (Minazzi, 2015).

The fact of sharing all kind of content or information either a comment, a photo or even a video has become a famous trend for selling and getting a job as "influencer", a new recent concept introduced in social networks.

The idea of showing and telling real stories attracts and persuades people to consume and try new experiences.
This action is called storytelling and has been defined by The National Storytelling Network as "the interactive art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination" (Minazzi, 2015, p.60).

Thanks to all these modifications, destinations have changed the way to promote themselves. In other words, the tourism industry has been in a revolutionary way affected by the Internet both as a source of information and as a sales channel. No matter where destinations are located that photos, videos, comments, reviews, stories, visitor's recommendations and online marketing bring destinations closer to the possible visitors. Destination's reputation can be enhanced using social media as a tourism marketing tool and even better if marketers ensure that they belong to the creation of marketing strategies.
(Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka, 2015)

For this reason, social media has such important power in the tourism industry, in the way suppliers sell their products or destinations and consumers respond and react to them.

Concluding this section, the analysis of this research will be based on the changing tourism sector since social media is in our lives, when online communications were developed. A good practice of the two concepts previous mentioned, social media and online communications, can benefit the tourism industry, in a globalised world where either positive or negative information is available for everyone and the online reputation together with social media is at present playing an important role in tourism.

2.Object of study

2.1. The evolution of Tourism

2.2. Definition and explanation of what comprises the touristic sector

The tourism industry is known as one of the leading sectors regarding the economy, sources of income and foreign exchange. The studies affirm that the growth in the tourism sector and all that is involved with will continue in the future making tourism one of the most important industries worldwide (Glaesser, 2006).

As it was mentioned before, in the official definition, the word tourism describes the movement of people, visitors or tourists, far from their home for a certain period of time and for different reasons like leisure, gastronomy, culture, sports among others ((Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997).

The existence of tourists makes possible to generate growth in the economy, either in the present or in the future.

The definition of tourist refers to "the travellers leaving from their usual environment, with any purpose, excluding categories like emigrants and those who travel for work" (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997, p.50).

Without tourists, tourism would not be possible. They choose destinations according as the last ones are shown to the world as well as images, prices, activities, location and other features.
In addition to the tourist definition, to understand the tourism sector as a whole, other specific definitions should be mentioned.
The combination of goods, services and facilities available in the destination, creates the essence of a tourism destination and makes possible to sell that place as a tourism product.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019), a tourism product is a combination of elements that can be tangible and intangible such as natural resources, attractions, facilities, services, activities… around a specific place of interest. All these combined elements represent the main important point of the destination which will be priced, sold and promoted through distribution channels and count on a life cycle according to the marketing mix strategy.
 A tourism product creates an overall tourist experience including significant feelings, emotions and sensations that also matter to potential customers.

Customers will make decisions about the next tourist destinations they want to visit having into account the characteristics previously mentioned, that can be significant to make their choices.

A tourism destination is a country, city, region or other physical space with or without administrative and regulated limits in which a tourist can spend an overnight. It is the core of products, services, activities and experiences along the

tourism value chain. A destination incorporates various contributors who can network to form larger destinations and its image and identity may influence its market competitiveness being a considerable unit of the analysis of tourism. (UNWTO, 2019)

In the destination, complementary goods and services such as transport and infrastructure, human resources, technology and other support activities which are not directly related to the core of the tourism businesses have a great impact on the tourism value chain, defined as well by the UNWTO (2019) as the sequence of main and supportive activities which are essential for the performance of the tourism sector. Linked processes such as legislation, planning, management, product development and packaging, promotion and marketing, distribution and sales and different services and operations are key primary activities to develop the tourism value chain.

Kiráľová & Pavlíčeka (2015) affirm that "destinations are also considered as geographical region understood by visitors as a unique entity where facilities and services are designed to meet the needs of the visitors" (p.359).

Destinations will be considered special for visitors if they fulfil or exceed their first expectations.
The complementary goods and services they can find as well as security, protection, healthy conditions, pleasant clime… will create a trustworthy image of the destination where travellers can see as a good option to go.

In tourism, networking and good communications can be relevant because since the tourist leaves until he or she returned from their journey, every part can be crucial.

Tourism sector comprises physical travel agencies, tour operators, online travel agencies (OTAs), meta searchers, airlines, incoming agencies, tourist guides, transfers, accommodation and other participants… that need to be connected to offer the best service to the final customer, the tourist. The tourist experience will be satisfactory if the expectations are met and destinations use their resources and take care of them.
Some important examples of firms within the tourism sector are Iberia, Ryanair and Emirates as airlines, Iberostar, Melia and Marriott as hotel chains, Booking, Expedia and Hotels.com as OTAS, TUI, DER Touristik and Alltours as tour operators, Halcón Viajes, Logitravel and Viajes El Corte Inglés as traditional travel agencies and Airbnb, Home Away and Wimdu as holiday rental.

2.3. The history of tourism

Tourism is greatly related to the culture, the history and the heritage of any city. Many destinations are touristic because of their history and architecture besides their landscapes. For instance, cities like Berlin, capital of Germany, one of the leading countries in the Second World War, remains famous because it preserves part of the heritage from the first world war such as the Berlin Wall, which has become an important tourist attraction or the city of Segovia, in Spain, which preserves its ancient Roman aqueduct.

The following research (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997) divides the touristic activity around the world in four stages, affected by different events. These stages are divided in four sections: tourism prehistory, the transport, the inter-war period and the tourism takeoff.

2.3.1. Tourism prehistory (476 A.D-1600)

The first of the four stages were recorded since the Middle Ages until the beginnings of the 17th Century when the industrial growth had its biggest expansion. The wealth growth, the commercial and professional development, the Reformation effects and the education secularization encouraged the interest of other countries considering that travelling was seen as an educational element. The Roman roads provide an efficient system to travel and for communication within Europe. After the fall of the Roman Empire, wars and pilgrimages result in considerable sporadic movements.
 In the 18th Century, young and wealthy men, looking for a professional career in administration, law or the army were attracted to explore foreign countries, a premature version of the *Grand Tour.*
The *Grand Tour*, is considered for many authors the beginning of the tourism.
It was a widespread journey through the main European countries with educational purposes. This trip was only made by the descendants of the most powerful families. (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997)

2.3.2. The transport (1830-1914)

The railway era originated in the middle of the 19th Century, represented a second stage in which steam trains and cruises changed the travel opportunities. The fast population growth and wealth created a huge market in the short-term. In that moment, the mass trip was invented and with it, the tourist complexes development. Furthermore, other agents appeared: tour operators with new marketing methods, organized trips, the package tours, brochures…
Even though the transport was a main growth factor, there were also some problems because of lack of coordination between transport plans and tourist projects politics.

It should be noted that during this period in Europe, Thomas Cook was the first one that introduced the package holiday in 1841, huge company that unexpectedly went bankrupt in 2019. (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997)

2.3.3. The inter-war period (1918-1939)

The third stage was represented by the inter-war period, from 1918 until 1939, a period of 21 years quite affected by the most important recessions in the world starting in 1930, which exercised an important influence limiting the development of tourist journeys.

The railway and the steam era were interrupted by the First World War in 1914, but the war also stimulated the road transport expansion and some great aviation investments. The technical progress was boosted as well by the military needs and the state expenses. It was the beginning of a mobility and communication period, which completed the changing cycle from a static community to a mobile one with long-range effects for communities and countries.

However, it was above all the beginning of the automobile era. At the end of the First World War, in 1918, travels recovered relatively quickly when prosperity returned. Important tour operators started offering cheap transport for tourist purposes. Furthermore, new trends such as a big variety of leisure activities, camping, caravans, hostels, cheap transports, bus trips… were introduced, but again, these new ideas were interrupted. (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997)

After the prosperity of the 1920s, concluded the First World War, where citizens, commercial and touristic activities among others were trying to recover from the last conflict, another depression took place.

In October of 1929, the financial house of cards came crashing down with the collapse of the stock market. By 1932 the crisis was devastating and nearly one in four Americans was without a job (Beaton, 2012).

Great Depression affected the worldwide economy and it did not finish until 1939.

At that moment, a recovery period was initiated but another interruption came about in 1939, the Second World War, which remained until 1945 (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997).

2.3.4. The tourism takeoff (1945- 1995)

This period, began in 1945, and has been characterized by a great technological revolution, a progressive development and different massive industrial changes. The demand determinants never have been better to promote the expenditure on trips and vacations. The continuous GDP growth of 3% or more in the prosperous years for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, was an incentive for a travel development. There was an increase of a yearly 6% or more in travelling. (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997)

Buswell (2011) affirm that by 1945, 116. 900 tourists visited Mallorca staying for 421.400 bed-nights and honeymooners were particularly one of the best predominant targets.

During this moment, the population from developed countries had access to the automobile, which in some respects changed people's lifestyle.
The aviation was a less used means of transport before the Second World War, as transatlantic travels were made only by sea. However, after 1945, aviation became successful, supplying faster and cheaper ways of long-distance transport. The cheap vacation transport in Europe, through charter flights, the most of them operated by tour operators, promoted the massive trips from the north of Europe to the Mediterranean. Gradually, the foreign places' attraction exceeded the national product interest and travelling became available for everyone. Vacations and travels were not a luxurious service anymore, they became a habit and part of life.
According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the tourist flows increased at a yearly average rate of 7,32% from 1950 until 1991 and registered an increase from 69 million of tourist arrivals in 1960 to 537,4 million with some exceptions in 1994.
However, some factors such as recessions, political instability… caused a troubled decline of some of the principal traffic flows, limited investments and commercial organizational changes.(Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997)

At the same time as the roads system was in development and the use of the automobile became known as a means of transport for half and long distances, the process of hotels changing locations was emphasised.
All this combined factors gave rise to a mass tourism.(Khatchikian, 2008).

2.4. Tourism today

Mass tourism was associated with the desire to travel and with including this practice as a usual lifestyle.
Mass tourism changed positively the economy of many countries (Tissot, 2010). but it also generated some negative issues that performed the need for taking specific measures like tourist taxes in some countries as an example.

Despite new regulations, diverse studies confirm the touristic activity growth and the evolution that the tourism sector is facing over the years. For many countries, tourism is one of the most important activities and the use of technologies are considered a useful method to influence its practice.

According to Camilleri (2018), the tourism industry development has achieved to situate tourism as one of the largest economic sectors in the world.
Nowadays, tourists require information about their prospective destination, before leaving home and once they arrive. This information should give them details about the local people and their customs, language, currency, climate, activities, amenities, transport, accommodation and attractions.

At this time, travel marketers can increasingly impact their consumers through mobile devices, including smartphones and tablets offering them information, offers, discounts…

The usage of mobiles has changed the way consumers buy their flights or their hospitality products and it also changed the consumers' perceptions, attitudes and expectations.

The National Statistical Institute (INE) affirm that in 2010, the tourist activity influence reached to 10,2% of national GDP in Spain, three more tenths than in 2009.

Therefore, in the next graphic, the increasing number of tourist arrivals in Spain from 2016 until 2019 is confirmed.

The following graphs will show the number of inbound tourists according to the different countries of origin, the total expenditure they have made and the specific number of workers the Balearic Islands had in the tourism sector in 2019.

Graphic 1. Evolution of the number of tourists from 2016 to 2019 in Spain
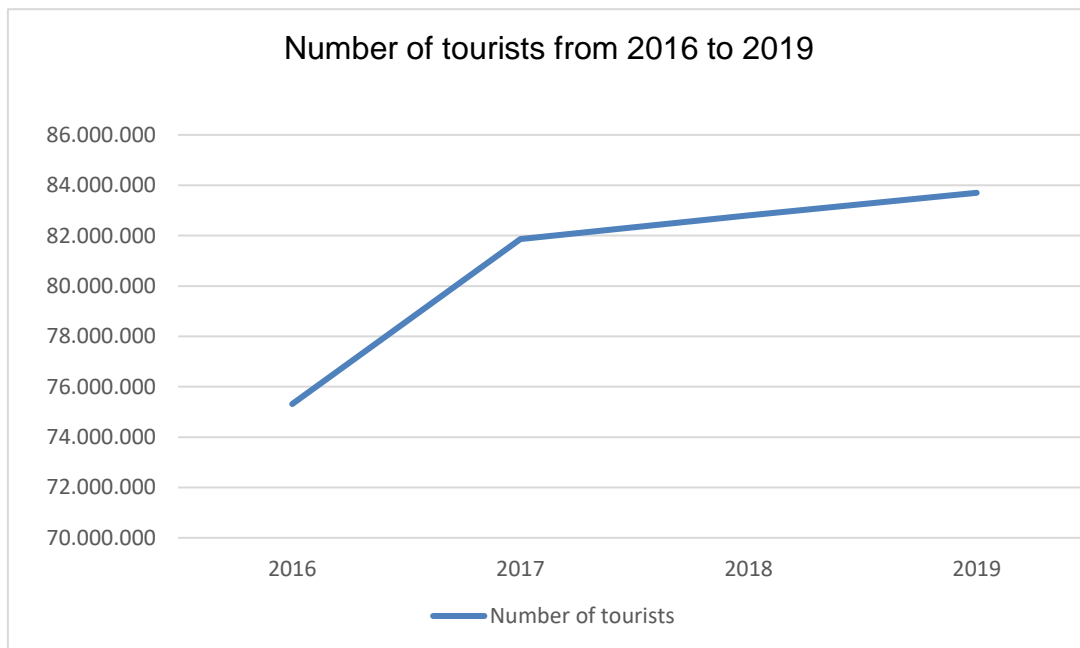
Source: *Own creation from the data collected in Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE). Frontur 2019.*

As we can see, the total number of tourists visiting Spain from 2016 to 2019 has increased. Whereas in 2016, 75.315.008 million of tourists visited Spain, in 2019, the total number reached to 83.701.011 million of tourists.

The Balearic Islands Statistics Institute, known as IBESTAT, registered in the month of February of 2020 a total of 305.723 national and international tourists travelling to the Balearic Islands as the principal destination.
From the 305.723 tourists, 253.367 visited Mallorca, 32.065, Ibiza-Formentera and 20.291 visited Menorca.

Despite the evolution of tourist arrivals recorded during the last four years at national level, in the Balearic Islands, the number of tourists from January to February of 2020 reached to 546.941 which represents a decrease of -3,4% compared to the last year.

Graphic 2. Number of tourists according to the origin country in Spain in 2019
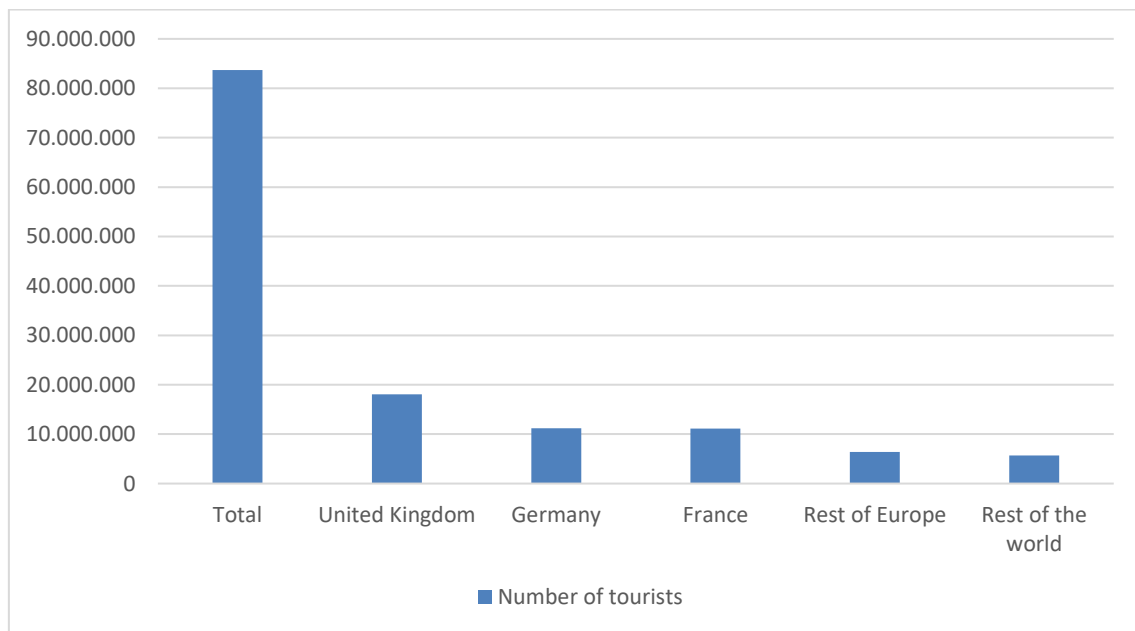
Source: *Own creation from the data collected in Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) Frontur 2019.*

In 2019, FRONTUR, the organism in charge of collecting data about the tourist flows at borders in Spain, registered 83.701.011 of tourists according to their country of origin, of which 18.080.012 were from United Kingdom, the most

important inbound country in Spain as the graphic confirms, 11.177.393 were from Germany and 11.161.068 came from France.

This year, Spain has received 4,4 million of international tourists in February, 1,0% more than the same month in 2019.

From the total number, IBESTAT recorded in the Balearic Islands in the month of February of 2020, 120.172 were national tourists and 185.550 were international. The main inbound country was Spain with a 39,31%, then Germany with a 36,82% and finally United Kingdom with 6,29%.

Graphic 3. Tourist expenditure made by the international tourists according to their country of origin in 2019
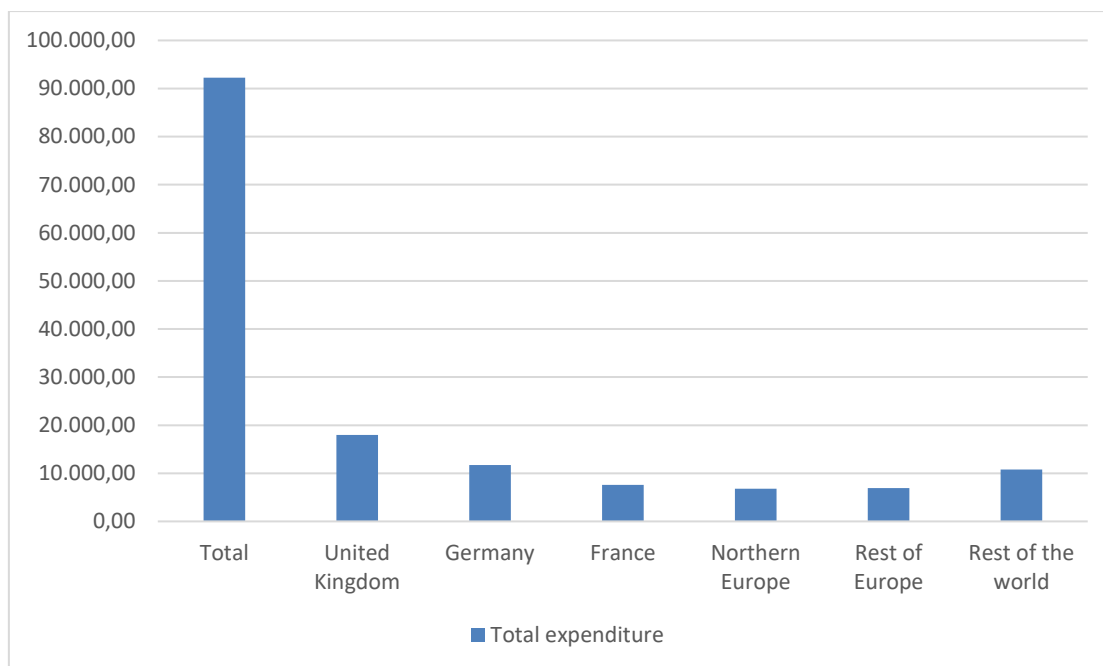
Source: *Own creation from the data collected in Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) Egatur 2019.*

According to the INE, tourism in Spain registered 147.946 million euros in 2018, generating a 12,3% of GDP. The tourism branches generated 2,62 million of jobs and 12,7% of total employment.

The touristic activity generates important economic flows not only for the tourism industry also for the commercial sector, restaurants, cinemas, night clubs and other available services or activities tourists can spend on.

The total expenditure of the international tourists visiting Spain in 2019 was 92.278,26 million of euros. The country which made the biggest expenditure was the United Kingdom spending a total amount of almost 18.000 million of euros. The total expenditure in the month of February of 2020 increases 1,2% in comparison to the same month in 2019 and the daily average expenditure is situated in 156 euros, a 5,3% more than in February of 2019.

Graphic 4. Number of active workers in the Balearic Islands within the tourism sector in 2019

Source: *Own creation from the data collected in Institut d'Estadística de les Illes Balears (IBESTAT) and Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) 2019.*

Within the tourism sector, the total number of companies in the Balearic Islands reached to 18.215 according to the data registered in the official website of IBESTAT, including hotel industries, intercity transport, terrestrial transport, maritime transport, air transport, travel agencies, tour operators, leisure and cultural activities among others.

In the current context, as the graphic shows, the total number of workers in the Balearic Islands reached to 172,6 thousand of people actively working in the tourism industry in 2019, without including the unemployed for more than a consecutive year and last but not least, the number reached to 3.037.598 million of people at national level according to the Turespaña survey.

2.5. Social Media

2.5.1. Definition of social media

Different studies and articles have defined the concept of social media.
All the definitions agree on the importance of the Internet to perform the social web and the generation of content and relationships that can be established.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as a group of Internet applications developed in a technological and ideological sense based on the foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the generation and exchange of User Generated Content (Minazzi, 2015).

Another research defines the same term but with different words. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as well as Xiang and Gretzel (2010), define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and that enable Internet users from all over the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, thoughts, experiences, information, and relationships" (Leung, 2013, p.12).

The main difference between the two last definitions is on the explanation of UGC, User Generated Content that can be described as the capacity of users to create, post and share content like photos, text or videos free of censorship at low cost or free of charge (DesAutels, 2011).

Other authors like Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) affirm that the User Generated Content is a variety of new online platforms and emerging sources of online information that are created, shared and used by consumers to inform users about products, brands, services, personalities and issues.
According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007), User Generated Content has three main characteristics: it is public and available on the Internet, it reflects the consumer's ideas, thoughts or its creativity and is normally created in a nonprofessional sphere (Minazzi, 2015).

However, back to the subject, social media has been defined as websites which allow the relationships between known users or strangers as well as a the creation of profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media is not only a communication tool but also a marketing tool.
Before travelling, people want to know about the resources and the opportunities a destination has. They check the online recommendations, posts, comments and reviews of every place they want to visit on their social networks, virtual communities ... They are interested in the things they can do, how the public transport works, the accommodation options they have, the restaurants in which they can eat and other questions they have in mind.

For this reason, some companies also changed their promotion structure, because today is more efficient to pay for an online advertisement that shows in real-time, for instance, a travel experience than paying for street billboards.
For example, blogging is considered one of the best promotion marketing strategies because it implies low costs for marketers, unlike traditional advertising (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013).

Customers prefer to have easy and quick access, updated opinions, real images and locations… and all that can be offered by social media.

The consumerism is at the order of the day and the online platforms are the trendy and more useful means to satisfy costumers' needs.
Social media also allow knowing new destinations, products and services that never were heard before.
This phenomenon makes the life of a tourist easier and it offers new options for making tourism.

2.5.2. Evolution of social media

Social Media grows with the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) and especially with Web 2.0 that translated to the tourism industry is known as Travel 2.0 (Minazzi, 2015).

The advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) from 1970 has transformed the tourism sector as well as other business strategies and practices.
In the 1970s, were developed the Computer Reservation Systems (CRS), afterwards, in the 1980s were originated the Global Distribution Systems (GDS), which caused a big change in the tourism distribution structure together with the CRSs and then in the 1990s was created the Internet, which has marked a milestone in the history of communications influencing customers and suppliers. People are increasingly more connected to the Internet for longer periods and through multiple devices like computers, smartphones, tablets, TVs… (Minazzi, 2015)

To continue with the evolution of social media, we will briefly describe the definition of CRSs, the first created systems in the tourism sector.

Schulz, (1996) defines CRSs as systems for exclusively logistical functions that store current information about the available service providers and through the appropriate infrastructure transfer such data.
The four most important global distribution systems are Amadeus, Galileo, Sabre and Worldspan.

Moreover, the definition of the second originated systems should be mentioned.

Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) are identified as a worldwide computerized reservation network. Its function electronically connects the tourist offer with the tourist demand (Radulovic, 2013).

These connections make things easier and allow to establish better relations between customers and suppliers. But with the arrival of the Internet, these relations have been strengthened.

The ICT development starts with the first stage of the World Wide Web (WWW), known as Web 1.0 but the following stage called Web 2.0 immediately appeared (Minazzi, 2015).

The concept of Web 2.0 has been defined by different authors but in this research only three different definitions will be named.

O'Reilly (2005) defines Web 2.0 as the network used as a platform, reaching to all connected devices. Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the inherent advantages of the platform, distributing software as a continually updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and reproducing data from multiple sources. It includes individual users while providing their data services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through participation and going beyond what Web 1.0 provided to deliver rich user experiences.

However, in 2006, Musser and O'Reilly redefined the term Web 2.0 as a set of economic, social, and technology trends that together form the basis for the new generation of the Internet, characterized by user contribution, openness and digital connections (Minazzi, 2015).

And the last definition made by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) agree on that Web 2.0 is the combination of technologies and ideologies that enable the creation of media content on the networks and encourage the evolution of social media (Sims, Wolf, & Yang, 2017).

On a Web 2.0 platform, people or groups tend to share their ideas, knowledge, experiences and skills in different social media. The people on the other side of the screen learn through practice, imitation, observation and participation, where socialization takes place.

Social media provide information and the opportunity for users to share their knowledge and experiences. In the tourism industry, the knowledge shared is based on the travel member's desire to exchange his/her experiences with other members (Nezakati et al., 2015).

The online channel takes a great relevance whereas GDS are diminishing, even though one of the main hotel strategies is to be present in the highest number of distribution channels, addressing their reservations to cheaper channels like the Internet, in order to obtain the better profits reducing to the maximum their costs.(Fuentes Moraleda, Figueroa Domecq, & Bendrao Balthasar, 2003)

2.5.3. Main social media platforms

The online platforms have been gaining a lot of prominence in the online community during the last years. Social media platforms can be seen as one only kind of media but as some studies confirm, they can be classified into different types:

- Social Network Sites (SNSs)
- Collaborative projects
- Virtual communities
- Content communities
- Virtual games/ social worlds

Social Network Sites (SNSs) are websites that allow subscribers to connect an interact with other people. The starting point is the creation of a public or semi-public profile followed by an invitation to other members to share profiles (becoming friends), thus being automatically added to the list of contacts. This creates a group of people who share information and content (text, photos, videos, etc.) (Minazzi, 2015, p.12)

One of the first social networking websites was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997. This site enabled users to connect with people, create their own profiles and make lists of friends. However, Facebook, launched in 2004, remains the most popular social networking site with more than 1 billion accounts all over the world. Furthermore, Facebook has proved to be one of the most widely used social media for access to social care, known as the interaction of customers with a company, a brand or a product on the corporate Facebook page.

Many companies are already using social networks to improve their business strategies, their communications and reach their objectives. In some cases, the idea is transforming social networks into distribution channels to draw the customers' attention. For instance, in the hospitality industry, there is available the "book now" function in the Facebook page, which connects directly with the hotel's booking engine.
In other cases, SNSs can be used for professional reasons in the case of Linkedin or social and leisure purposes like on Facebook. Their functions are completely flexible because of the capacity for connecting people with different objectives. (Minazzi, 2015)

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) what makes social network sites special is not that they allow people to contact with other individuals to meet new people, but rather they enable users to make visible their profiles and social networks with the point of communicating with their surroundings or people they already know.
This is the previously mentioned adaptability that social networks have, unlike other platforms which can be used for only a particular purpose.

The second type of social media is the so-called collaborative projects, based on the Wiki technology, closely related to an open-source software. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) wiki websites allow all the users who visit the page to create, remove and modify text-based content without the need of being subscribed.The most popular example of collaborative projects is Wikipedia. (Minazzi, 2015)

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopaedia in which contents are provided voluntarily from all users known as Wikipedians, whether peers contributors or experts.
Since its foundation in 2001, Wikipedia has obtained a total of 923,879 users and the content is available in more than 280 different languages. Wikipedia has been also adapted to the travel sector with the name of "Wikitravel" whose aim is the creation of a free, up-to-date and reliable travel content with the contribution of travellers/users who can share their experiences adding, removing or changing the information offered in the website. (Minazzi, 2015)

Collaborative projects can be defined as social media applications that enable the conjunction and simultaneous creation of knowledge-related content by many final users. Firms can influence collaborative projects as an essential element of their online presence to establish communication both externally with stakeholders and internally among employees. In this research it's also mentioned the importance of how should be controlled any situation in which negative information is posted on collaborative projects and in fact, it can become a threat for firms. (A. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2014)
This is an important issue in the open online world of communications, where all the information can be freely posted, shared or removed, negatively affecting any of the parties as different research confirmed.

The third kind of social media are virtual communities, defined by Wang et al. (2002) as "groups of people who interact with specific purposes, under the governance of certain policies and with the facilitation of computer mediated communication (CMC)" (Minazzi, 2015, p.8).

On these platforms people can share information, content (text, audio, video) and opinions about any topic, writing also reviews or diaries. Some platform examples are Twitter, Tripadvisor, Virtual Tourist and personal blogs (Minazzi, 2015).

Other authors like Blanchard and Markus (2004) see the sense of community, as well known as (SOC) the principal characteristic of virtual community platforms.
"Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging; a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.9).

As Minazzi (2015) affirms, virtual communities can include blogs, micro-blogs, and commercial review sites where is possible to interact with bloggers who can add comments and share their experience building a virtual community.

Pan et al. (2007) state that blogs can be used to provide general information about a specific topic, normally accompanied by real and personal life experiences.

The blog concept is also applied to the travel sector, where different studies classify blogs into specific categories. For instance, Schmalleger and Carson (2008) classify blogs into four different types:
consumer-to-consumer (C2C), business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C) and government-to-consumer (G2C) different from Thevenot (2007) who identifies four principal categories for travel and tourism business blogs: individual, collaborative, corporate and traditional media. (Minazzi, 2015)

Moreover, in a more transparent world thanks to the online communications, blogs can also be used by firms to offer information, news or interaction with their customers. These blogs are called corporate blogs.
One of the most important examples is the corporate blog of Marriott called *Marriott on the move.*

As it was previously mentioned, the second kind of virtual communities are micro-blogs, which can be situated in a halfway point between traditional blogs and social networking sites regarding social media classification. One of the best examples is Twitter. The mechanism is comparable to that of blogs but with limits in the length of the content.

Last but not least, the commercial review sites are recognised as platforms where people can share information, opinions and write review. The main difference with a corporate blog is the consumer-to-consumer orientation and the importance of online ratings. The best example in this section is TripAdvisor. (Minazzi, 2015)

The following kind of social media is known as content communities, websites that allow users to share with a network of contacts media content of different types: texts (i.e., Bookcrossing), photos (i.e., Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram), videos (i.e., Youtube). The shared content can be private, visible only to the user's network, or public, when other people in the social community can look at the user's pictures and videos (Minazzi, 2015, p.11).

Finishing with the different types of social media, there are the virtual games or also known as social worlds. They are defined as platforms where users can play and interact with other users as in real life. They can represent a character, or they can appear as an avatar. Some examples are X-box or Sony Playstation (Minazzi, 2015).

In this context, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) propose two recognised dimensions regarding the base of the theories of social media research: social presence/media richness (low, medium high) and self-presentation/self-disclosure (low and high). Social presence refers to the acoustic, visual and physical contact between two communicators while media richness is the quantity of content that the media allow being transmitted in a specific interval of time. The self-presentation is a combination of the tendency to develop interactions with

other people in order to control their feelings and the self-disclosure is the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information according to the image one would like to show. (Minazzi, 2015)

Apparently, social network sites and content communities may appear to be almost the same and their platforms can be confused. Both types of sites allow users to create profiles, create connections to other users like "friend" or "follower" relationships, and provide contributions to the site.

However, one of the differences is that whereas in a social networking site, self-presentation and self-disclosure constitute the primary content, in content communities the content being shared, such as videos, comments or photos, is the most important content on the site. This shared content then provides the space where conversations between users occur. In the case of social network conversations are developed in the private space of an individual member's wall or profile and in a content community the interaction between members occurs in a public space within the site.
Therefore, some recent platforms that started as content sharing sites gradually have been adding social features and now, they look more like social network sites. (Thompson, 2011)

To conclude this section, we cannot finish without talking about one of the most popular platforms in the world within the hospitality industry. We are talking about Airbnb. Airbnb is an online platform that "allows online visitors to book accommodation for entire homes, private or shared rooms" (Camilleri, 2018, p.16).
According to Oskam & Boswijk (2016), Airbnb and its fast growth have become an important competitor for the hospitality industry, tourism and tourist destinations creating consequential impacts. The sharing economy describes the idea of sharing, providing or having access to economic and social activities in an open-source community via online.

Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, (2016) affirm that sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb have greatly prospered in the tourism industry during the last years. Fifteen years ago, this kind of accommodation did not exist but in the present, many travellers use this platform as an option instead of hotels for staying during their trips. Some people prefer to share an apartment or spend the night in a simple room because is much cheaper than a hotel room.

Airbnb is the market leader and best-documented case in peer-2-peer (P2P) accommodation, but the phenomenon of online hospitality businesses includes several other companies, such as HomeAway, Wimdu or HouseTrip. (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016).

The concept of peer to peer is defined as a point-to-point connection between two equal participants and it was originally used to describe the communication of two peers like in a telephone conversation (Peer-2-Peer Systems, 2005).
From this connection of two equal individuals, consumers can also act as providers getting profits from the activity, product or service they are offering.

"Consumers become co-creators of value and have the potential to become entrepreneurs by dealing with their assets like renting out their houses and apartments" (Boswijk et al., 2015, p.24). Those individuals who can rent their accommodation benefit from this online marketplace, but the fact that others are at disadvantage has forced some countries to take measures like forbid the vacation rentals in the city centres.

2.6 Social media and Tourism

After the concepts we have mentioned about tourism and social media, in this section the relationship between both branches will be underlined.

During the last years, social media have been changing the way people interact with others and with brands or companies.

This is true especially in the tourism sector where customers more and more often interact with other people on social media during the different phases of their travel planning, especially during information search. (Minazzi, 2015, p.15)

To give evidence of what we mentioned, some important studies with specific numbers will be stated.

For instance, the *American Association of Travel Industry* (TIA, 2005) estimates that "67% of the travellers with an Internet connection use the Web to search information related to tourism destinations" (Reino, Serna, Lamsfus, & Azua-Sorzabal, 2012).

Torres (2010) affirms that "a recent research from Google has shown that 84% of leisure travellers used the Internet as a planning resource" (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013, p.6)

Social media have been widely adopted by travellers to search, organize, share and annotate their travel stories and experiences.
The World Travel Market 2011 Industry Report announced that more than one-third of all leisure travellers in the United Kingdom choose their hotels based on social media sites like TripAdvisor and Facebook. (Leung et al., 2013, p.4)

Moreover, as other studies described, the posts that travellers upload on their social networks can be used by other travellers to make decisions depending on the information they find.

According to Minazzi (2015) a study by Google Think Insight (2013) confirms that both leisure and business travellers increasingly use the Internet to search online reviews of other travellers (42% leisure; 55% business), find inspiration (42% leisure; 48% business), and look at content related with travels or reviews by friends or family (27% leisure; 39% business).

The percentages demonstrate the high relationship that exists between the social media and both the travel and tourism sector as well as the importance of new technologies in our lives.

Therefore, also has been perceived "the capacity of social media in helping tourism and hospitality companies to engage potential guests, increase their online presence, and thereby lead to greater online revenues" (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013, p.4).

In this sense, everything is connected; the most interaction consumers did on the platforms, the best knowledge and promotion companies can get raising their profits and reputation as well as the economy as a result.

As it was named in the previous paragraph, with new technologies, one of the most important issues for companies is the online reputation.

Firstly, the concept of reputation is defined by Kotler et al. (1994) in the context of tourism destinations as the sum of believes, thoughts, feelings or impressions that a person defends (Reino et al., 2012).

However, this concept translated to the current online world, known as online reputation is defined as "a way of measuring customer ratings and, when shared on the Internet, it generates expectations for future users" (Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Voltes, & Rodríguez-Voltes, 2018, p.1)

The online reputation, based on the information customers share from their experiences is transmitted through comments, evaluations, photos, videos…The information is exchanged through an interactive process between companies and clients, creating an abstract image of the real service being offered. This phenomenon is recently in development and affects customers influencing their decisions as well as competitiveness between companies.

Online reputation can be considered as a competitive positioning problem because as it was mentioned in the definition, creates expectations that must be afterwards satisfied. Customers' online reviews can be divided into quantitative and qualitative variables. On the one hand, quantitative variables are used to measure the quality of the service, the value and the added value and on the other hand, qualitative variables are used to study customer satisfaction.

(Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Voltes, & Rodríguez-Voltes, 2018)

2.6.1 Social media impacts on travellers and suppliers

As the previous sections have been underlining, social media greatly impacts travellers and suppliers in the tourism sector.

Factors, D. (2011) affirms that the advent of social media networks is extremely changing the way we communicate, interact and socialize. These networks are also creating impact on travellers and the way they think, consumer behavior.

"Consumer behavior can be defined as the study of how and when individuals, groups and organizations select, purchase, use and dispose of products, services, experiences or ideas to satisfy their needs" (Tetteh, 2019, p.1).

In tourism, consumers develop a set of actions when they plan any travel with the objective of living the best tourist experience. These actions are made in three phases, before leaving, during the trip and when they finally come back home.
Engel et al. (1990) describe these three phases as "pre-trip, during-trip and post-trip".
In the first phase, travellers start making decisions about the destination they want to visit.
Gretzel et al. 2006; Xiang et al. (2014) affirm that "the steps of the pre-trip phase lead the traveller to make decisions and create expectations about the upcoming tourism experience" (Minazzi, 2015, p.54).
A travel experience defined by Tung and Ritchie (2011) is "an individual's subjective evaluation and undergoing (i.e. affective, cognitive, and behavioral) of events related to his/her tourist activities that begins before (i.e. planning and preparation) during (i.e. at the destination) and after the trip (i.e. recollection)" (Minazzi, 2015, p.62).

The experience is what tourists could remember and compare throughout their lives. Each travel experience can have a specific value depending on the quality of the offered service.

The tourist experience involves the whole travel plan, as Kotler et al. (2010) affirm, the travel planning starts with the recognition of a need that can be generated by internal and external stimulating actions (Minazzi, 2015).
According to this research, the first moment a customer decides to make a trip is because of the feeling to satisfy their needs, change their usual environment and live a new experience.

Once tourists decide their destination, they value the total travel experience since they leave home until they are back, not the individual products or services they can get during the trip or in the own destination.

"People do not buy products, or even services; they purchase the total experience that the product or service provides" (Dimmock, 2012).

Moreover, social media provide travellers a wide range of options to choose a destination, fact that in the past, the variety of destinations was different without the online platforms.

Before social media, travellers could use the typical concept of word-of-mouth but in the present, as Jacobsen & Munar (2012) affirm, "the increased usage of social media brings eWOM, electronic word-of-mouth, closer to WOM, traditional word-of-mouth communication which is still a crucial information source for travel planning and decision-making" (Nezakati et al., 2015, p.123).
Thanks to eWOM, travellers have online real information about a destination, product or service.
The concept of eWOM is defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via Internet (Minazzi, 2015, p.22).

Furthermore, eWOM unlike the traditional WOM gives the opportunity of keeping the message, the photos or the experiences lived by travellers forever.

Thanks to social media and IT improvements, the communication between users has been greatly improved having access to different devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets…to search all kind of information without costs.
"Social media give travellers the opportunity to organise and plan their trips as well as keep and share their experience and memories" (Leung et al., 2013).

In this first phase, as Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) confirm, "sharing information on social media websites is known as a significant source of information that can help travellers in travel decision-making" (Nezakati et al., 2015, p.123).

Decision-making can also be affected by our surroundings in the planning process. Having contact with the family, friends and other people, influence our decisions and the desire of travelling and trying what the rest is trying.

A study of White (2010) demonstrates that "travel-related photos generate an interest in friends that affects the travel plans" (Minazzi, 2015, p.55).

It could be affirmed that in this pre-trip phase, the mainly function of social media is to transmit the desire for travelling and give support to the customers' decisions.

In the second phase, during the trip, travellers continue looking for information and making decisions.

Travellers generally use multiple devices during the journey, especially mobile devices, smartphones (Expedia, ComScore-Expedia Media Solutions, 2013) as they will be mentioned in the next section.

Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2014) state that "searching for information on social media during the trip can also have the objective to reduce the perception

of risk and increase the perception of safety". "The diffusion of mobile technologies has particularly affected the possibility for people to create context-related information and to share real-time experiences". (Minazzi, 2015, p.58).

Besides the search of information and the action of sharing their experiences, another sharing activity travellers use during the trip is posting online reviews on travel review websites, giving scores, publishing photos and describing the experience.
Few studies underline a major use of social media for searching information during the pre-trip phase when travellers start discovering (Cox et al. 2009) and during the post-trip phase for sharing their experiences (Fotis et al. 2012), but a recent research made by Munar and Jacobsen (2014); Xiang et al. (2014) underlines the increasing importance of social media in the during-trip step of the travel planning process mainly due to the development of mobile technology (Minazzi, 2015, p.59).

According to Tussyadiah et al. (2011), the narrative reasoning and narrative comprehension that readers possess have a substantial impact on the usage of UGC on social media as well as on travellers' subsequent behaviour. In general, blogs and the content shared on online communities are travel stories and experiences that are presented in a narrative format. The author affirms that stories have the ability to encourage audiences to visualise the consumption of a product or service. (Leung et al., 2013, p.9)

Travellers have confidence in real-time situations. Their feelings are influenced by the products they can see or the activities they can do because social media provides them with all the information they need to know to live an experience.

In the last phase, after coming back home, travellers evaluate the quality of the entire travel experience based on their perceptions creating an overall customer satisfaction judgment. This evaluation could determine the action of posting a review online on specific websites such as TripAdvisor.
Despite the increase of real-time interaction during the trip, thanks to better Internet connectivity at destinations, sharing experiences can be exposed also after the trip. (Minazzi, 2015)
According to a report of comScore (2013), "45% of travellers after the trip post travel-related content on social media and write online reviews". (Minazzi, 2015, p.59).
In relation to the previous statement, in the post-trip phase, almost the half of visitors continue interacting about their travel experiences on their online platforms. They can have more time to share and organise the content created during the travel.

Fotis et al. (2011) revealed that "social media are predominantly used after holidays for experience sharing" (Leung et al., 2013, p.10).

With social media, the free access to several platforms is a powerful tool to reinforce the communication either writing reviews, reading someone else's comments, uploading videos or photos, etc. without limitations. Users can freely

connect on the Internet, providing interaction and participation to the network at any time. As Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010) affirm "all users can actively participate in the generation or enrichment of content" (Leung et al., 2013, p.10).

In addition, social media that allow spreading information and sharing UGC, can act as a virtual media of transportation in the tourists' minds.
Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) state that one of the content communities like videos have been demonstrated to be mediators of travel experiences able to generate a mental pleasure through the imagination people can create in their minds, only dreaming and visualising the images of being visiting a certain destination, having the opportunity of re-experiencing the past (Minazzi, 2015) but videos, also are mediators for pre-experiencing the future in the planning phase, to motivate the traveller's interest for a destination.

It should be noted that travellers share their content with others on their platforms with some purposes. The following studies have found a couple of reasons for posting travel content on social media.

 Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts (2007) found that sharing life experience and social interaction are two major factors motivating bloggers to generate UGC.
Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, and Díaz-Armas (2011) observed that travellers' participation in social media is attributed to their expected social, hedonic and functional profits (Leung et al., 2013, p.10).

As the studies confirm, customers want to satisfy their needs and expectations looking for comfort, quality and pleasure.

Additionally, suppliers are also affected by social media.
Tourists use online platforms to interact with companies when they share positive or negative UGC.
The interaction between companies and customers in social media can be an opportunity to create loyal clients, offering them advantages, making them repeat and maintaining a trustworthy relationship. When the feedback is positive, companies benefit from that winning reputation, but when is negative is because a complaint or dissatisfaction. (Minazzi, 2015)
In the latter as Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) consider "a good complaint management process is essential for a successful customer care" (Minazzi, 2015, p.60).

Since the development of IT, from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, companies communicate in different ways via online with their customers and on their created websites.

Social media help to create emotional ties, interaction, reputation, commitment, loyalty, customer care and customer engagement among others between firms and clients. (Minazzi, 2015)

Customer engagement is defined as "a psychological state that occurs by the virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experience with a focal agent/object (eg., a brand) in focal service relationships" (Brodie et al. 2011, p. 89).

According to Minazzi (2015) "companies work on different marketing strategies like brand awareness to improve their recognition and content-creation to engage their customers".
Firms need to know about their customers and listen to their proposals to develop strategies that can meet their expectations.

Leung et al. (2011) demonstrated that "monitoring travel blogs could be a cost-effective approach for destination marketers to understand travellers' experiences" (Leung et al., 2013, p.11).

 In this regard, it can be proved that firms also make research to study what clients are asking for, besides they need to follow an updated content monitoring process and a continuous relationship to gain customers' trust.

2.7 Mobile social media in tourism

In this last point, mobile phones will be the prominent ones as they are during the last decades in social media and our lives.
Kozinets et al. (2010) state that thanks to mobile technologies, the opportunity travellers have to connect to social media during their trips, makes possible a real-time sharing of experiences and stories, that can produce possible opinions, comments and feedback in general concerning family or friends that offer suggestions and interpretations of the tourism experience. (Minazzi, 2015, p.62)

This phenomenon, called Mobile storytelling is defined by Klastrup (2007) as "the structured and shared presentation of visual material produced with a mobile device, supplemented by text and/or music and sound" (p.2).
The development of Mobile storytelling lead to a new interpretation of "interactivity" with a story, different from that intended within the traditional concept of Storytelling. The study of Klastrup (2007) shows an increasing trend of creating stories around available content (photos,videos, etc) rather than around a "real" experience. (Minazzi, 2015, p.62). The means by which stories are transmitted with visual or auditory content is more appreciated than a told story according to the previous study.

Moreover, smartphones offer a wide range of innovations through the applications people have access to. In the tourism sector, the first mobiles were used as electronic tourist guides and now thanks to Global Positioning Systems (GPS) technologies such as location-based mobile Apps, travellers can make decisions in real-time about different services directly offered at the destination in original ways, and what's more, smartphones provide them the services to improvise or manage unexpected situations, so that they can continue with their sightseeing activities. (Wang & Xiang, 2012)

Smartphones make travellers' life easier because they enable to support travel activities like planning, reservation and navigation. Tourists have free and total

access if they need to find a restaurant, a taxi or other means of transport, a city guide, the hotel location among others (Minazzi, 2015).

As previous research have been proving, we can affirm that a great relationship between travellers and mobile technologies exists. In social media, this relationship is known as Mobile Social Media (MSM).
According to Kaplan (2012), Mobile Social Media can be defined as "a group of mobile marketing applications that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p.131).

To conclude it should be mentioned that the use of smartphones has become a worldwide phenomenon that has changed besides communications, interactions…the way we grow and develop. "The role of IT in tourism has evolved from the wired (connected through the Internet) to the wireless (connected via mobile devices). Now, smart technology, (connected through sensors and data clouds) defines a new era of tourism" (Koo, Gretzel, Hunter, & Chung, 2015).

As the previous research affirms, mobile technology represents a new era of tourism on this one and its surrounding have been affected. New technologies have been adapting the content to these devices where the information, the tourist experience and the entertainment are some important points tourists look for on their smartphones.

3. Methodology

The present study has been made following a deep research of knowledge about the tourism industry, the social media and the existing relation between them.
This study is based on a literature review including articles of the matter of tourism and its history, social media marketing and its beginnings, tourism and leisure experiences, the hospitality and the travel industry, social networks, UNWTO tourism definitions… published in knowledge of tourism and social media and gathered from Google Scholar, Dialnet, Science Direct, two physical books, *Una introducción al Turismo* and *Social Media Marketing in Tourism and Hospitality,* Jstor, Biblioteca UIB, Mendeley, WordReference and Grammarly as well as INE, Frontur, Egatur, Turespaña and IBESTAT to record specific data and figures from the last years that I used to perform some graphs.

4. Conclusions

I have chosen this topic because I find the connection between social media and tourism industry as a current growing phenomenon very interesting.

Considering the importance of social media in the tourism sector, the aim of this research is to raise awareness about the significance the touristic activity has in our lives as well as the great impacts that social media are generating in the tourism sector.

The fact of being daily connected to our social networks and other online platforms represent the art of social media to share content of quality.
This is what the tourist as customer wants; find quality, satisfy their needs and in tourism, as the most important activity in the world of services as well as one of the leading activities in the economy, the customer wants their expectations to be met.

For this reason, travellers in the planning process need to be well-informed and the best way is by real experiences as social media provide them.

It should be noted that suppliers are also affected by social media. They can use social media to understand their customers, improve their mistakes and enforce themselves.
The tourism sector has progressed including the new technologies as an essential part of the whole tourism business. Innovation, accessibility and interaction are three important issues travellers require.
For this reason, companies should keep the communication with their customers and constantly share new content on their platforms to achieve competitive advantage.

To conclude, we can affirm that social media is the best tool to connect tourists, tourism companies and tourist experiences. In this globalised world where technologies increasingly grow faster and destinations fight to be the best ones, we cannot forget that tourism professionals need to be always prepared, give solutions in case of problems, offer the best image on the networks and stay night and day updated considering that society and tourism are constantly evolving.

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