

ARE ROMANIAN TRAVEL AGENCIES CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE?

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Abstract: *The tourism industry has experienced notable changes because of the widespread adoption of social media. As a result, travel companies have been compelled to give greater importance to their online presence and proactively interact with customers via social media channels. This study aimed to assess the concern of Romanian travel agencies for their presence on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok through an analysis of social media metrics. According to the research findings, even though travel agencies exhibit a preference for Facebook when promoting tourism-related products and services, the other two analysed platforms yield greater user engagement. The study has implications for both management and marketing activities within the tourism field.*

Key words: *travel agencies, social media, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok*

1. Introduction

Social media platforms provide an unprecedented opportunity for companies to communicate with their target audience. Globally there are over 200 million business accounts on Instagram (Instagram, 2023) that users visit every day, and over 200 million businesses using Facebook apps and tools (Bagadiya, 2023). Moreover, with over 4.76 billion users (Kemp, 2023a) connecting daily on social media platforms, it makes them an ideal channel of communication between companies and customers. In Romania, at the beginning of 2023, there were 13.5 million users of social media platforms, representing 67.3% of the total population, which demonstrates the need for companies to be present on these platforms as well (Kemp, 2023b).

The rise of social media has revolutionized the process of seeking, discovering, acquiring, exchanging, shaping, and absorbing information (Sigala, 2011). The popularity of this phenomenon has also led to changes in the tourism industry (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Živković et al., 2014). This has forced travel companies to prioritise their online visibility and actively engage with clients on social media platforms. In this way, they can

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interact directly with customers, closely monitor their opinions and ratings on tourism products and services and go further in meeting their needs and preferences (Hvass and Munar, 2012).

In this context, the following questions arose in the authors' minds about some of the main stakeholders in this sector, namely travel agencies.

Q1: "Are Romanian travel agencies concerned about their social media presence?"

Q2: "Which are the social media platforms preferred by the Romanian travel agencies?"

Q3: "Are travel agencies in Romania interested in increasing their visibility on social media platforms?"

As the study was designed to be exploratory in nature, the authors did not formulate any hypotheses beforehand. The focus of this research was based on finding answers to the above questions.

Therefore, this research sought: (1) to evaluate the presence of Romanian travel agencies on the most popular social media platforms in the country, (2) to evaluate the activity of Romanian travel agencies on the social media platforms where they are present, (3) to identify those social media platforms where Romanian travel agencies receive the most engagement from their audience and (4) to determine the interest of Romanian travel agencies to increase their visibility on social media platforms.

2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives the authors conducted a social media analysis. The Facebook, Instagram and TikTok pages of 10 travel agencies from Romania were analysed. The choice of the three platforms was based on statistics provided by DataReportal (Kemp, 2023b) on the preferences and most frequently used social media platforms by Romanians.

In order to achieve the objectives, social media indicators such as the number of followers or fans, the number of posts, the number of reactions, comments and shares, the total number of people who viewed the content on all three mentioned platforms during the period 1 January 2022 - 31 January 2022 were examined. For objective four containing the benchmarking analysis, the social media indicators mentioned above were also examined during the period 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2021.

The complete data of the social media indicators involved in this research can be found in Appendix 1. This analysis was made possible thanks to the Socialinsider platform, which serves as a social media analysis, reporting and comparison tool (Socialinsider, 2023), where the authors had access for a period of two months between November 15, 2022 and January 15, 2023.

In addition, to achieve objective three, the authors calculated the averages engagement rate per post based on the number fans/followers and by reach, on all three platforms during the analysed period. The formulas used to calculate those indicators for each platform can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Calculation formulas for average engagement rate per post by fans and by reach

Average engagement rate per post by fans/followers	Average engagement rate per post by reach
<p>For Facebook</p> $\frac{(reactions + comments + shares)/posts}{number\ of\ fans} \times 100$	<p>For Facebook</p> $\frac{(reactions + comments + shares)/posts}{reach} \times 100$
<p>For Instagram</p> $\frac{(likes + comments)/posts}{number\ of\ followers} \times 100$	<p>For Instagram</p> $\frac{(likes + comments)/posts}{reach} \times 100$
<p>For TikTok*</p>	<p>For TikTok</p> $\frac{(likes + comments + shares)/videos}{reach} \times 100$

Note: Reach measures how many users saw the content. Source: (Michaels, 2023)

- *Because of the features of the TikTok platform, the relevant measure of engagement rate is not the follower base but the number of views.*
- *Source: (Gogolan Diana, 2022)*

In order to select the 10 most relevant travel agencies in Romania, the authors have monitored for two months, from 1 November 2022 to 31 December 2022, the results returned by the Google search engine on the first page, when typing the words "travel agencies Romania". The list of travel agencies whose websites were on the first page of Google during the above-mentioned period is presented in Table 2.

To strengthen their relevance for the research, the authors sought, with the help of the unique registration code publicly displayed on the agencies' websites, to find out their age on the Romanian market, at the time of writing.

Table 2

List of travel agencies included in the analysis

Agency name	Age on market	Agency name	Age on market
1. Christian Tour	26 years old	6. Dertour	5 years old
2. Tui Travel Center	4 years old	7. Happy Tour	29 years old
3. Eximtur	30 years old	8. Vel Travel	27 years old
4. Paralela 45	29 years old	9. Hello Holidays	12 years old
5. Karpaten	27 years old	10. Perfect Tour	19 years old

Source: (Risco, 2023)

3. Results

01. Evaluation of the presence of Romanian travel agencies on the most popular social media platforms in the country

According to the authors' manual search of the travel agencies in the sample, all of them are present on Facebook and Instagram platforms, but only eight out of the 10 are present on the TikTok platform. However, comparing the number of fans and followers on the three platforms (Table 3), the differences are extremely significant. For a better overview, Fig. 1 illustrates these differences.

On TikTok platform, except for Christian Tour which has a relatively large number of followers, the other travel agencies have an insignificant number of users who like their page. The number of followers on Instagram is not very high either. All travel agencies analysed have a higher number of fans on the Facebook platform.

Table 3

Number of fans/followers of social media pages of travel agencies analysed on 31.12.2022

Platform	Facebook (fans)	Instagram (followers)	TikTok (followers)
Agency name			
Christian Tour	243696	38029	43300
Tui Travel Center	8512	4152	10
Eximtur	75441	2590	0
Paralela 45	241655	10623	54
Karpaten	162343	10558	19

Agency name \ Platform	Facebook (fans)	Instagram (followers)	TikTok (followers)
Dertour	365789	17223	23
Happy Tour	21476	1577	13
Vel Travel	63432	2523	0
Hello Holidays	103982	13883	2859
Perfect Tour	52678	2587	19

Source: Authors' own creation with data provided from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok via Socialinsider

Regarding the Facebook platform, Dertour, Christian Tour and Paralela 45 have the highest ratings, while TuiTravel Center, Happy Tour and Perfect Tour have the lowest.

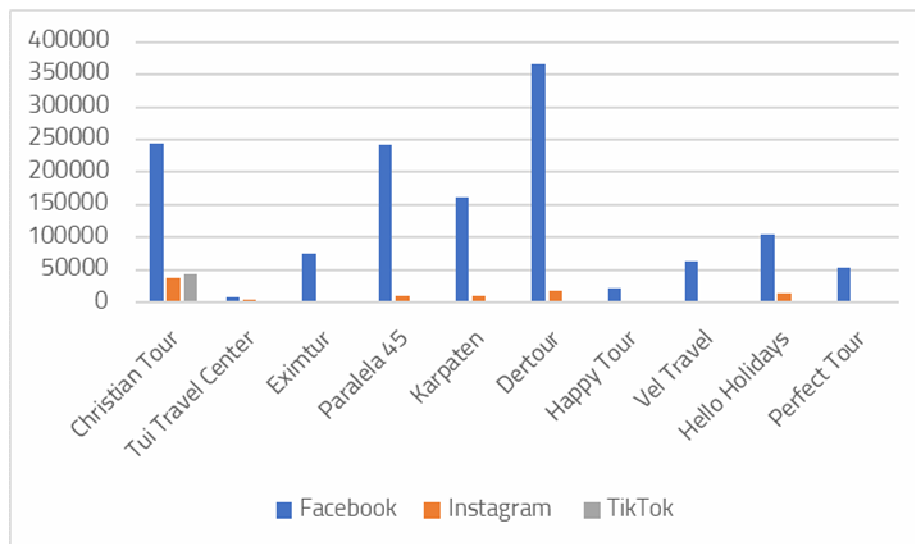


Fig.1. Number of fans/likes of social media pages of travel agencies analysed as of 31.12.2022

Source: Authors' own creation with data provided from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok via Socialinsider

O2. Evaluation of the activity of Romanian travel agencies on the social media platforms on which they are present.

Further analysis of the number of posts made by travel agencies on each platform shows that agencies are more interested in the Facebook platform than the other two (Table 4). Six of the travel agencies that have an account on TikTok posted an average of 5 posts during the period analysed.

Table 4

Total number of posts made by the travel agencies analysed on social media platforms in 2022

Platform Agency name	Facebook		Instagram		TikTok	
	Total posts	Average posts/day	Total posts	Average posts/day	Total posts	Average posts/day
Christian Tour	1572	4,30	326	0,89	383	1,04
Tui Travel Center	273	0,74	192	0,52	2	0.005
Eximtur	165	0,45	1	0.003	NA	NA
Paralela 45	1563	4,28	1496	4,09	2	0,05
Karpaten	726	1,98	476	1,30	3	0.008
Dertour	1179	3,23	818	2,24	7	0.019
Happy Tour	96	0,26	82	0,22	2	0,00
Vel Travel	139	0,38	87	0,23	NA	NA
Hello Holidays	1358	3,72	313	0,85	154	0,42
Perfect Tour	586	1,60	493	1,35	14	0.038

Note: Average post/day – the average number of posts per day during the period analysed. It is calculated as the numbers of posts divided by 365 days

Source: *Authors' own creation with data provided from Facebook, Instagram and TikTok via Socialinsider*

The travel agencies analysed made, on average, between 0.26 and 4.3 posts/day on Facebook, between 0.003 and 4.09 posts/day on Instagram and between 0.005 and 1.04 posts/day on TikTok.

O3. Identify the social media platforms where Romanian travel agencies receive the most engagement from their audience

Analysing the data in Table 5, it can be seen that the average engagement rate per post by fans and reach varied between travel agencies over the period analysed. The average engagement rate per post, based on fans, with the highest value on the Facebook platform was held by the agency Perfect Tour, and on Instagram by Eximtur.

Regarding the average engagement rate per post, by reach, the highest value recorded during the period under review was recorded on both Facebook and Instagram by the travel agency Eximtur, and on the TikTok platform by the travel agency Dertour.

Table 5

Average engagement rate per post, by fans and by reach

Agency name	Facebook		Instagram		TikTok	
	By fans [%]	By reach [%]	By fans [%]	By reach [%]	By fans [%]	By reach [%]
Christian Tour	0,12	0,01	0,44	0,01	NA	0,00
Tui Travel Center	0,68	0,03	0,30	0,05	NA	0,50
Eximtur	0,42	0,13	0,46	7,74	NA	NA
Paralela 45	0,22	0,00	0,16	0,00	NA	0,00
Karpaten	0,10	0,01	0,24	0,00	NA	0,37
Dertour	0,01	0,01	0,13	0,00	NA	0,57
Happy Tour	0,02	0,11	1,22	0,12	NA	2,6
Vel Travel	0,42	0,11	1,09	0,17	NA	NA
Hello Holidays	0,08	0,01	0,44	0,01	NA	0,03
Perfect Tour	0,09	0,01	0,41	0,00	NA	0,15

Note: NA - The TikTok platform was not included in this analysis according to the justification in the research methodology

Source: authors' own creation

In terms of the ranking of platforms with the highest average engagement by fans, Instagram is the winner in eight out of the 10 cases. Only two of the 10 agency profiles included in the sample have a higher fan engagement rate on Facebook than on Instagram.

As for the comparison between the three platforms regarding the average engagement rate per post by reach, the situation is as follows: the highest values were recorded by the TikTok platform (six of the eight who have an account), followed by Instagram and lastly Facebook.

O4. Determining the interest of Romanian travel agencies to increase their visibility on social media platforms.

To analyse the travel agencies' interest in increasing their visibility on the most used social media platforms where they are present, the authors considered the number of posts made by them in 2022 compared to 2021 (Table 6).

Regarding the activity on the Facebook platform, eight out of 10 agencies analysed posted less in 2022 compared to 2021, while regarding the activity on Instagram, more than half of the travel agencies analysed posted more in 2022 compared to the previous year.

It can be observed also that the average engagement is not necessarily correlated with the increase or decrease on the number of posts made.

Table 6

Evolution of the number of posts on the Facebook and Instagram pages of the travel agencies analysed in 2022 compared to 2021

Period Agency name	Jan.1- Dec.31, 2021	Jan.1- Dec.31, 2022	decrease / growth	Percent age rate (approx.).	Jan.1- Dec.31, 2021	Jan.1- Dec.31, 2022	decrease / growth	Percent age rate (approx)
Number of posts				Average engagement / post				
FACEBOOK								
Christian Tour	1687	1572	↘	6%	56.43	293.85	↗	421%
Tui Travel Center	322	273	↘	15%	6.96	58.70	↗	743%
Eximtur	194	165	↘	14%	187.20	322.12	↗	72%
Paralela 45	1589	1563	↘	1%	471.85	519.81	↗	10%
Karpaten	801	726	↘	9%	499.19	172.79	↘	65%
Dertour	960	1179	↗	22%	158.77	67.34	↘	58%
Happy Tour	84	96	↗	14%	29.11	5.68	↘	80%
Vel Travel	290	139	↘	52%	163.40	269.79	↗	65%
Hello Holidays	1448	1358	↘	6%	130.75	83.25	↘	36%
Perfect Tour	607	586	↘	3%	41.80	49.54	↗	19%
INSTAGRAM								
Christian Tour	651	326	↘	49%	71.51	170.86	↗	138%
Tui Travel Center	170	192	↗	12%	6.56	12.82	↗	95%
Eximtur	25	1	↘	96%	13.04	14	↗	7%
Paralela 45	958	1496	↗	56%	19.61	17.04	↘	13%
Karpaten	274	476	↗	73%	32.98	25.84	↘	21%
Dertour	69	818	↗	1085%	62.28	23.20	↘	62
Happy Tour	78	82	↗	5%	14.65	19.32	↗	31%
Vel Travel	50	87	↗	74%	16.08	27.72	↗	72%
Hello Holidays	321	313	↘	2%	101.93	61.16	↘	39%
Perfect Tour	601	493	↘	17%	5.08	10.82	↗	112%

Note: Average engagement /post – the engagements of the post divided by the number of posts published in the period analysed

Source: Authors' own creation

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Because of the exploratory nature of the analysis conducted, this research does not pretend to extrapolate the results to the macro level, however considering that the sample included those travel agencies that appear on the first page of Google and their longevity, we can consider them relevant to the Romanian tourism market.

The travel agencies examined are concerned and aware of the importance of their social media presence. Although they focus on Facebook as the platform on which all the travel agencies in the sample post the most content, the results regarding the

impact of the other two platforms, Instagram and TikTok, are interesting. Thus, the findings of this study offer practical implications for tourism business managers and marketers in the tourism industry, as we will discuss below.

Based on the research we could see that the average engagement rate per post by reach was, in most cases, higher on TikTok than on the other two platforms, and this is most likely due to the way the algorithm works on the platform. This information can be valuable for travel agency managers and travel marketers in Romania to consider when developing their social media strategies. However, it is also important to note that creating content exclusively in video format can be more challenging and requires a different set of skills and resources compared to other platforms. Therefore, it is essential to carefully assess the feasibility and effectiveness of using TikTok as part of their overall social media strategy.

One other interesting aspect of the research, with implications for managers and marketers in the travel industry, is that it is not only the increase in the number of posts that leads to higher engagement, but other factors can also affect engagement levels, such as the quality of content or changes in the platform algorithm. Thus, simply increasing or decreasing the number of posts does not always have a direct impact on engagement.

In conclusion, social media marketing is a useful tool for travel agencies, and in the digital age, their presence on these social networks is essential, even if this comes with various challenges.

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Appendix

Social media metrics of the 10 travel agencies analysed, from 1 January to 31 December 2022

Facebook

Agency name	Christian Tour	Tui Travel Center	Eximtur	Paralela 45	Karpaten	Dertour	Happy Tour	Vel Travel	Hello Holidays	Perfect Tour
Social metrics										
Fans	243696	8512	75441	241655	162343	365789	21476	63432	103982	52678
Posts	1572	273	165	1563	726	1179	96	139	1358	586
Engagement	461935	16026	53150	850685	125452	78797	546	37475	113055	29036
• Reactions (+)	402238	10109	46918	812477	118461	65192	486	33217	97953	27701
(-)	401773	10094	46883	812218	118413	65162	486	33187	97555	27588
	465	15	35	259	48	30	0	30	38	15
• Comments	38061	3438	4184	15005	2042	9266	37	2157	9285	284
• Shares	21636	2479	2048	23203	4949	4339	23	2101	5817	1149
Total posts reach*	2015818	161117	230844	6485664	1032466	589629	5092	235063	647944	249294

Note: Fans - the number of fans the page has at the end of the period analysed; Posts – the number of posts published in the period analysed; Engagement – the sum of reactions ((+) positive, (-) negative), comments and shares received of the posts published in the period analysed; Total reach – the total number of people who see the content.

*The number is approximately

Instagram

Agency name	Christian Tour	Tui Travel Center	Eximtur	Paralela 45	Karpaten	Dertour	Happy Tour	Vel Travel	Hello Holidays	Perfect Tour
Social metrics										
Followers	38029	4152	2590	10623	10558	17223	1577	2523	13883	2587
Posts	326	192	1	1496	476	818	82	87	313	493
Engagement	55690	2462	12	25477	12295	18967	1584	2412	19138	5325
• Likes	33289	2012	12	25215	12195	18817	1497	1379	18781	4917
• Comments	22401	450	0	262	100	150	87	1033	357	408
Total posts reach*	907361	25611	155	190715	721948	371953	15251	15465	605711	283878

Note: Followers - the number of followers the profile has at the end of the period analysed; Posts – the number of posts published in the period analysed; Engagement – the sum of likes, comments and shares received of the posts published in the period analysed; Total reach - the total number of people who see the content.

*The number is approximately

TikTok

Agency name	Christian Tour	Tui Travel Center	Eximtur	Paralela 45	Karpaten	Dertour	Happy Tour	Vel Travel	Hello Holidays	Perfect Tour
Social metrics										
Followers	43300	10	-	54	19	23	13	-	2859	19
Posts	383	2	-	2	3	7	2	-	154	14
Engagement	130711	3	-	0	23	146	72	-	43740	171
• Likes	116592	3	-	0	22	135	63	-	43020	156
• Comments	1897	0	-	0	0	3	0	-	372	4
• Shares	12222	0	-	0	1	8	9	-	348	11
Total videos reach*	5389907	296	-	9176	2019	3645	1384	-	745308	7634

Note: Followers - the number of followers the profile has at the end of the period analysed; Posts – the number of posts published in the period analysed; Total videos reach – the total number of people who see the content (total number of video views)

The sign “-” represents the fact that these travel agencies did not have a TikTok account during the period analysed.

* The number is approximately