

## COMPLEXITY OF A SHARING ECONOMY FOR TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the significance of internet technologies for organizational development and adaptation to an ever-changing touristic business environment and its successful management. A model is proposed based on the concepts of a sharing economy, knowledge management and digital platforms for understanding the concept of sharing economy as it relates to the tourist and hospitality industry.

**Methodology** – The paper examines critical factors that influence the role of internet technologies in the touristic supply chain's organizational changes and their threats and opportunities for the tourist and hospitality industry.

**Findings** – The paper contributes to the discussion about the increasingly important role of internet technologies in the marketing strategies and operations of the tourist and hospitality industry.

**Contribution** – The topic is relevant for designing corporate strategies in tourist, transport and hospitality companies. Better understanding of the impact of the internet and communication technologies on marketing and management strategies could significantly enhance both the top and bottom lines.

**Keywords:** sharing economy, Internet, hospitality industry, tourism industry, collaborative marketing, information communication technology, Internet of things

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the 80s of last century great interest in time-sharing developed in the Anglo-Saxon business environment. A time-sharing model has since come to predominate in the tourist real estate market.

The reasons for this development are: (i) the inability of a large part of the population to afford their own apartment and (ii) real estate sellers noticed a potential for higher profits by selling one unit to multiple owners. Indeed, vendors have enabled co-owners beneficial long-term credit.

Co-ownership model enabled the owner of real estate to become someone who himself could not afford to purchase such a property. Investment in a time share apartment allows the buyer to use a residence for a specific period. However, economic and legal risks caused a decline in timesharing (Rohan and Furlong, 1984).

Technological development and the financial crisis in 2008-2009 led to changes in relation to ownership and transformation of the co-owner model to the co-sharing model. If people are accustomed of the co-ownership model they now have to get used to sharing their cars, bikes, flats, washing machines, etc. (Lietaert, 2010).

Sharing between people is process old as humankind, but the reason for the rise of a sharing model has been detected in the decrease of income in the middle class in the Western countries (Hacker and Pierson, 2011). This results in lower consumption. People have started to realize the costs caused by the ownership and sub-optimal utilization of cars, real estate and other goods. Innovative companies have started to promote services based on a sharing economy, creating a shift in the culture of possession of goods. The first applications of sharing economics have been in regard to durable goods such as cars and apartments (rentals) (Dominici. Roblek and Lombardi, 2016).

The development of the information and communication technologies (ICT) in the second decade of the 21st century has enabled the creation of strong mutually cooperating web communities, which are peers sharing digital products and information (Hamari, Ukkonen and Sjöklint, 2015).

A sharing economy becomes an economic activity based on person to person (P2P) and business to person (B2P) communications. Online platforms become an important part of a sharing economy that enables people to participate in collaborative consumption (Albinsson and Perera, 2012). Companies should be aware that customers are becoming the new marketers with extensive opinion – leading talks about the brand, with help of the viral marketing (worth – mouth to mouth) as an important marketing tool for the companies (Roblek et al., 2013). Viral marketing develops the triadic relationship between company, customer and the community, as a result of customer exchange of information (e.g. opinions, rating) based on similar personal characteristics and needs (Palmer and Lewis - Koenig, 2009). Online platforms enable the creation of relations between users themselves and with the companies. The potential value added of the web communication channels is in the anticipation of the quality and safe access of knowledge (e.g. behaviour characteristics) for both individuals and the company (o'Dell and Hubert, 2011; Roblek et al., 2013).

In tourism and hospitality, a sharing economy is recognized as a form of: (i) knowledge sharing, which includes ideas, experiences, information about guests, HRM information, specialized knowledge, such as information about the investors etc.; (ii) sharing of the opinions and views of users about the quality of experiences about touristic and hospitality services; (iii) sharing of objects and areas that are intended for tourist activities) (Gretzel et al., 2015).

Information technology is becoming an important factor in companies' business models. With platforms like Airbnb the information technologies compete with the hotel industry. Hotel managers have to be aware of the influence of IT, including social media platforms that create opportunities to improve the entire value chain of the hospitality industry. New technologies create value added in terms of financial benefits

and intangible assets such as improved networking, communication and customer services (Roblek et al., 2013).

In the central European region, too, platforms such as Uber and Airbnb are growing. These going digital platforms rely on revenue-generating activities and less on classical sharing. According to profit oriented platforms it should be noted that co-owning as a sharing model in tourism and hospitality are not free for the user. The user is paying the owner proportionately with the time of using the object. The narrow parts of the platforms are non-profit, such as the couch surfers who are hosted free of charge in the homes of others (Schor and Fitzmaurice, 2015).

The goal of the paper is to achieve a better understanding of the impact of a sharing economy, ICT and internet technologies on tourism and hospitality industry and to discuss the question of how a sharing business model can become a driver of economic activity in tourism and hospitality. Research question (RQ) was set, i.e. How can sharing economy and the development of the ICT and internet technologies (e.g. IoT, digital platforms) influenced on business performance in tourism and hospitality industry?

The paper is structured as follows. After the introductory part of the paper, the first part explores the theoretical frameworks of a sharing economy in tourism and hospitality, the second explores the connections of the information and communication technology and the rise of the collaborative consumption in tourism and hospitality. The third part includes creating a sharing economy business model in tourism and hospitality and tries to determine its future role. The last part is the conclusion.

## **1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this paper is to determine what has been researched so far about the importance of sharing economy and its impact on the changes and adoption in tourism and hospitality industry that results in managerial implications (e.g. strategies), organizational changes, consumer's satisfaction and key drivers of the sharing economy in tourism and hospitality industry.

In order to achieve this objective, a comprehensive review of journal articles, conference papers, books and edited volumes was performed.

Relevant literature was searched by querying online databases for the terms:

- sharing economy;
- tourism industry;
- hospitality industry;
- web 2.0;
- information communication technology;
- collaborative marketing;
- internet of things.

Since the topic of the paper is relatively new and relevant, a review of the literature on sharing economy and internet technologies (e.g. Internet of Things, social media), with the objective of bringing to the fore the state-of-art and initiate for further research, is utmost important.

To provide a comprehensive bibliography of the academic literature on sharing economy, internet technologies and new marketing approaches, the following available online journal databases were searched: EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar. The relevant papers were included and analyzed by topic area. The research approach is presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: **Research approach**



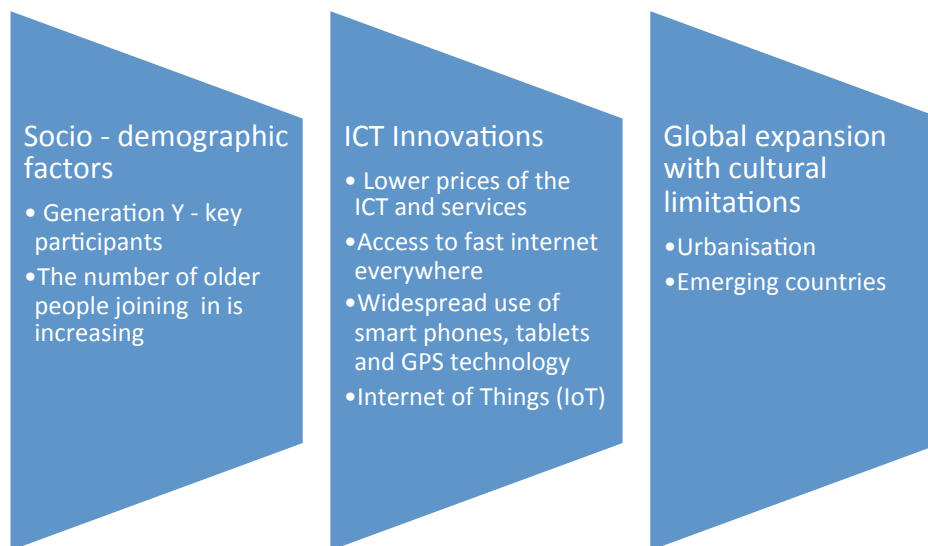
Source: Authors

## 2. SHARING ECONOMY IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

### 2.1. Challenges and drivers for the expansion of the sharing economy in the tourism sector

The global economic crisis (2008-2011) and risks of recession (2015-2016) exposed the uncertainty in the business environment (Dominici and Roblek, 2016; Chan Ping, 2015). The recession is encouraging consumers to look for cheaper options and community members to look for supplementary incomes. Key drivers for the development of a sharing economy in tourism and hospitality include socio-demographic factors, increasing a number of innovations in the field of ICT after the 2008 and global expansion with cultural limitations (figure 2).

Figure 2: Key drivers of the sharing economy in tourism and hospitality



Source: Authors

### 2.1.1. Socio-demographic factors

When considering the context of socio-demographic factors, one should be aware of the differences in the use and handling of computer technology and the resulting effect on the performance of business processes due to personality differences and norms between generations, from the baby boomers, through Generation X, Generation Y and the new upcoming generation Z.” Their differing views on the acquisition and sharing of knowledge are leading to different value systems, affecting views on work habits. Values include ideals that dictate judgment, decisions and actions. Evaluation and view of work is affected as much by generational factor as that simply of age. Mistakes of the older generations in relation to the younger are associated with different values. Distinctive values may lead to intergenerational conflict, often the result of different views on the use of technology and the perception of ethical rules. The marketing of tourism services via the internet have to be paying attention to this; it is necessary to define the target population and it is appropriate to adapt the usability of the website (Roblek et al., 2014).

Urbanization forms one basis for the development of a sharing economy. In cities a high density of consumers is coupled with limited space enabling the sharing of certain resources to take place with ease. Urban consumers have higher incomes than their counterparts, and to some degree greater skills and educational attainment. Thus urbanization can result in greater consumer market gains. It is predicted that by 2030 70% of households globally will be urban (Euromonitor International, 2014). Cities in North America and Western Europe are the key markets for Airbnb. It is mainly an urban phenomenon, although rural rentals are available.

### *2.1.2. ICT innovations*

ICT innovation factors are changing customer behavior and the traditionally structured tourism supply chain, which is now forced to adopt a comprehensive infrastructure based on a more flexible organizational structure in order to implement on-demand marketing and technological innovations (Autry, Goldsby and Bell, 2013).

The internet is becoming more important in the field of tourism, in marketing and managing. In this information systems play a significant role, including the processes of booking management and secure online payments. This process leads to the transformation of potential demand into actual and cheaper payments. Online technologies and the emergence of semantic have impact on increasing the collection and analysis of information available to the guest through interaction fostered by web portals. Semantics provides greater personalization of websites, which actually means the recognition of guests' needs and wishes, based on experience recorded in a database (target marketing offer). Thus, the internet has become a strategic marketing tool that increasingly affects the provider of touristic services and can yield a destination competitive advantage (Roblek et al., 2014).

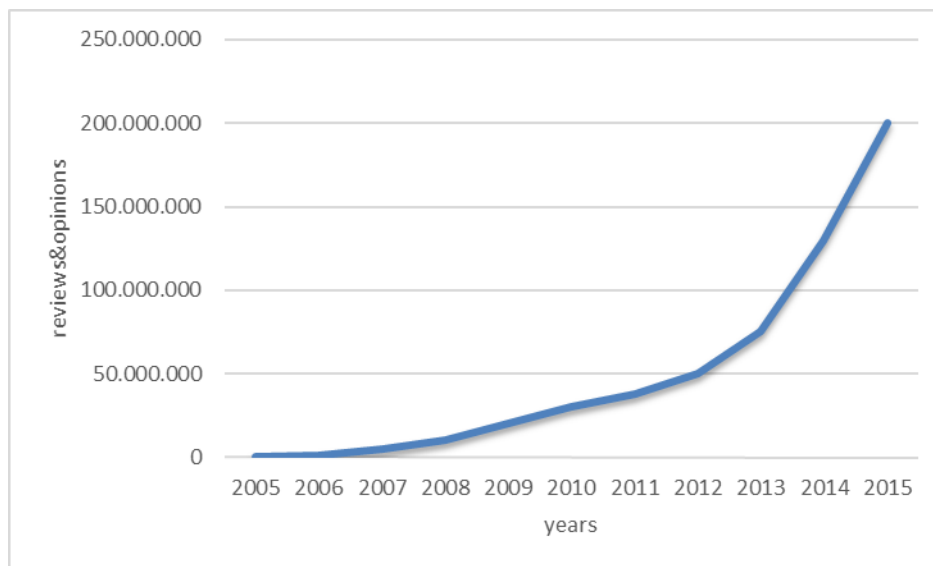
The development of Web 2.0 has had a significant impact on the development of relations among the touristic service providers (e.g., hotel, room or flat owner) and guests (B2C) as the guests themselves (C2C). Sites like Facebook (800 million active users) and TripAdvisor (50 million unique monthly visitors) enable people to seek trip information and advice from the sources they trust the most.

This is the reason communication between hosts via online tools use so-called viral marketing (portals, blogs, chat rooms, etc.), which has a significant impact on the good will of the touristic service provider brand. De Ascaniis and Morasso (2011) mentioned that this Consumer-Generated Media (GCM) or User-Generated Content (UGC) has become very important for the reputation of a destination because it is the opposite of traditional forms of media and marketing since content is generated by the consumer rather than by the marketer.

One of most important UGCs and knowledge sharing tools in tourism is TripAdvisor, founded in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer and Langley Steinert. It is a travel website that provides reviews and other information for consumers about travel destinations around the world. It included in 2015 a list of more than 5.3 million businesses and properties in over 126,000 destinations, one of the largest internet collections of travel photos, and featured accommodation in more than 45 countries, more than 290 million reviews and opinions from travellers around the world; on average, nearly 2,600 new topics are posted every day to the TripAdvisor forums. The TripAdvisor mobile has had 230 million mobile app downloads, including 215 million downloads of the core. Nearly 50% of users visited TripAdvisor via tablet and phone. TripAdvisor is an innovator in mobile trip planning. They also include an off line feature which allows travellers to download TripAdvisor reviews, photos and city maps before they go and then access this information on their trip when no data connection is available, helping them avoid costly roaming charges (TripAdvisor, 2016). The importance of this media for free knowledge sharing and the online reputation of hotels, small private accommodations

and destinations is shown by the increasing number of reviews and opinions posted to their sites (graph 1).

Graph 1: **TripAdvisor reviews and opinions**



Source: TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2016)

One impact of TripAdvisor on hotel business is seen in the response of the "online reputation services" company called KwikChex. They are acting on behalf of more than 1,000 hoteliers. They estimate there are at least 27,000 legally defamatory comments on TripAdvisor, "allegations that are false and should, if necessary, be tested in court." (Cohrane, 2011).

The most important alternatives to TripAdvisor are:

- TripExpert, which offers expert hotel reviews;
- Localeur, which focuses on local perspectives about the best places to eat, drink and play;
- Gogobot, which was one of the first social recommendation start-ups (established in 2010) to lean on the interconnected relationships between people to deliver filtered travel experiences.

The internet of things is just coming to have an affect on tourism and hospitality. Today 99% of physical objects remain unconnected. According to Gartner, there will be nearly 26 billion devices on the internet of things by 2020 (Gartner, 2014). The IoT will allow greater personalization in the travel and hospitality industry (Dominici et al., 2016);

- The Hilton Group deployed worldwide "connected hotel room keys" in 2015: the guest opens his hotel room with his smartphone, as he has downloaded an interactive key;

- The London City Airport will be the first airport to implement IoT: at airport the security lines and travellers will be tracked, and the traveller will be notified of waiting times with a 'ping' on his smartphone; if a traveller misses his flight, auto-rebooking will be done; by putting a sensor in travellers' luggage, they can track where it is via an application on their smartphone.

The Benefits of IoT that will be applied to the hospitality and travel industries are:

- New marketing opportunities: as consumer behaviour is tracked and analysed;
- A personalized and more convenient travel experience;
- Improved service thanks to relevancy and automisation: offering travellers relevant information at the right time, possibly driven and automated by artificial intelligence.

### *2.1.3. Global expansion of a sharing economy and cultural limitations*

A sharing economy is recording growth globally. It should be emphasized that the boom of a sharing economy is occurring in Asia and South America, where urbanisation has had important influence (e.g., in Shanghai, Seoul, Rio de Janeiro); where the largest proportion of Generation Y lives; and where smart phones are especially popular (though Australia ranks in this same category). In emerging countries, though, the main limitation to growth is simply vast poverty and thus low levels of education and poor internet infrastructures (Euromonitor International, 2014).

## **2.2. Influence of the official regulations and public authorities' policy on the sharing service providers in tourism and hospitality in the EU**

The European Commission and the European Parliament has not yet adopted uniform guidelines and directives for the operation and control of digital platforms. In 2015, the Commission launched a website which seeks the views of interested stakeholders on which measures would be needed at the EU level (European Parliament. 2015).

The emergence of digital platforms like Airbnb and Uber has caused local city authorities to begin preparing local legislation on the functioning of the digital platforms and the payment of taxes from income gained with apartment and transport services.

The measures of local authorities in Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, London, Paris and other French cities regarding the control of operation service offerings of digital platforms in the tourism sector go in the direction of (Euromonitor International, 2014):

- the prosecution of illegal renting;
- zoning: determining the areas in the city where renting is permitted for purposes of tourism;
- Taxation of Airbnb hosts from income gained, while visitors must pay hospitality taxes.



It is expected that the legal regulation will be harmonized inside the EU members during few years. Individual countries will take over in its legal framework best practices of other member states.

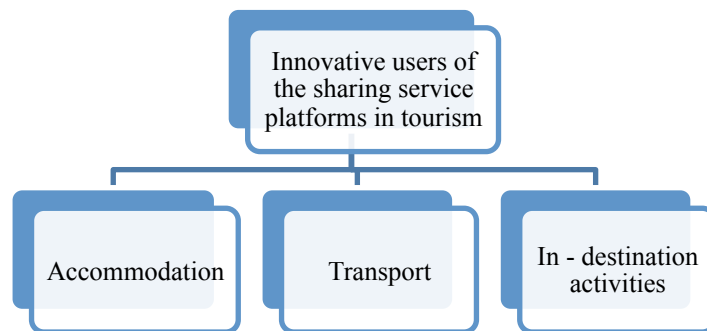
### 3. THE COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

The innovations in digital and web technologies are include electronic commerce as a new dimension of the business. Electronic commerce today provides an opportunity in the field of tourism, transport and hospitality, because internet technologies reach hundreds of millions of people.

With the growing boom of online technologies that occurred in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century came an increasing online offer of tourist arrangements. Such portals have appeared as Booking.com, reservation and information portals, railway portals (e.g., Trenitalia, DB Bahn, etc.) and providers of airline tickets (e.g., Expedia.com).

The customers have been given the opportunity to searches online himself and compare the offers from various travel agencies, destinations, hotels, airlines and other providers of tourist services (figure 3).

Figure 3: **Innovators in the field of development and the use of sharing services platforms in the tourism sector**



Source: Adopted by Euromonitor international, 2014 (Euromonitor International, 2014).

A sharing economy has, with its peer to peer model (figure 4) changed the value added chain. In this case suppliers share their resources temporarily with consumers, either free or for return (financial or non-financial). The digital platform acts as an intermediary between them Dervojeda et al., 2013). Digital platforms (e.g., Airbnb) launching collaborative consumption succeed especially when the process becomes more efficient through technology.

Figure 4: **Peer-to-peer model**



Source: Demary, 2014.

The processes of knowledge management are increasingly becoming dependent on search capabilities, data collection, processing, evaluation (critical judgment) data, information and concepts which are located outside the organization. The users of tourist services disseminate information on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction word of mouth (word-of-mouth-marketing) and their behavior and preferences are coordinated on the basis of information received from other tourists, tourist operators, media, etc.

The workers in the travel and the hospitality industry have to accommodate the new web - digital (e.g., a hybrid digital signage system and mobile technologies). It is recommended that they include in their strategy mobile application technologies (development of mobile apps, QR codes, discount coupons, make purchases and transactions through mobile applications), which allows flexibility in time and space and leads to the growth of interactive marketing tourism services in real time.

E-transmission of information by word of mouth plays an important role in the marketing of tourism and sector performance. Litvina, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) discovered that the most important source of information is gleaned when consumers make decisions about buying tourism services and products. The authors point out that viral marketing can represent a cost-effective use as a marketing tool in this evolving industry. In this case the visitor's (users of online technologies) become new marketers (viral marketing: communication is word of mouth + Web 2.0 and higher forms) with great influence on public opinion regarding the reputation and quality of each destination, hospitality or transport service.

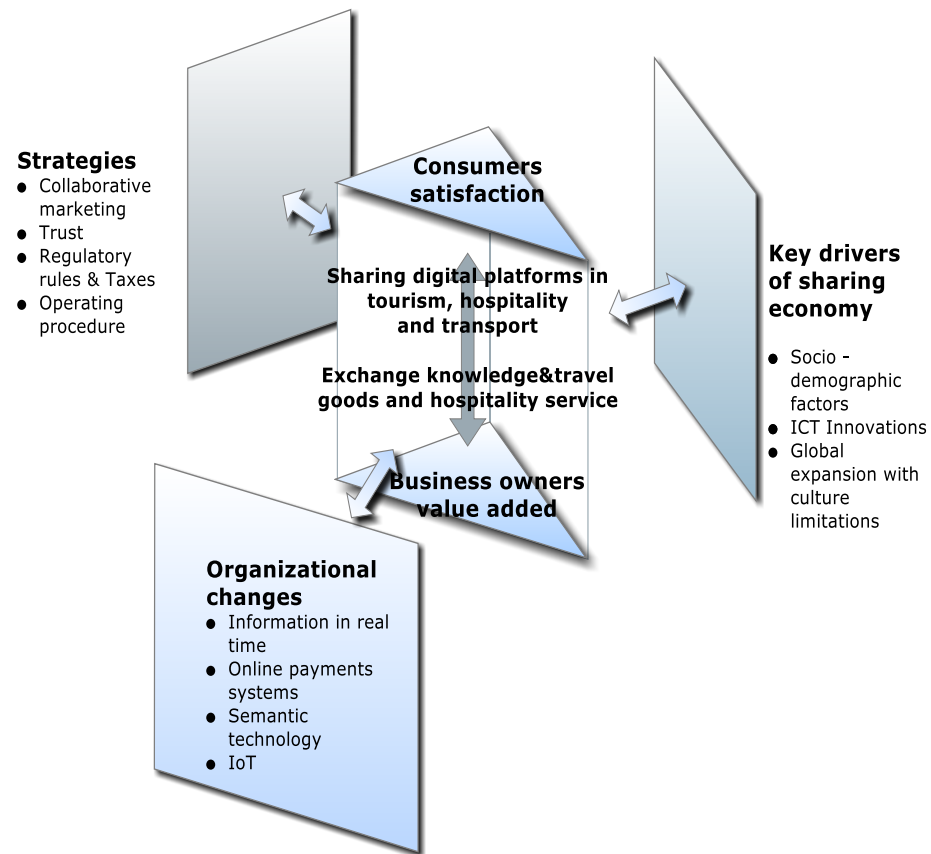
#### **4. A SHARING ECONOMY BUSINESS MODEL IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY**

In the context of creating the sharing economy business model (figure 5) in tourism and hospitality the authors followed Performance Prism (Neely, Adams and Crowe, 2001).

The key conditions for the development of a sharing economy in tourism and hospitality are socio-demographic factors and an increasing number of innovations in the field of ICT and its global expansion (with certain limitations). The model arises from the relations between consumers satisfaction with the knowledge, goods and service sharing and business owners (e.g., owners of knowledge, owners of digital

platforms, owners of apartments, transport companies, tourist agencies, hotels) which will, with organizational changes, investment in online payment systems (lower margins), semantic technology and the internet of things (IoT), pursue their profit and non-profit goals, develop sharing economy tools in tourism and hospitality. This will have a significant impact on transforming current threats to hospitality and the travel industry into opportunities in the near future. Sharing economics provides not only added value to both businesses and individuals in the form of intangible assets, but also affects the development of the tourism offer, raising the quality, focusing on the guests' needs, and increasing employability and the growth of incomes of both individuals and tourism, hospitality and transport companies (Euromonitor International, 2014).

Figure 5: A Sharing economy business model for tourism and hospitality



Source: Authors adaptation according to Performance Prism Cranfield University (Neely, Adams and Crowe, 2001).

All participants in the process of sharing economies must be mindful of the advantages and disadvantages brought by collaborative marketing. For the success of a sharing economy it is vital that all members of the process establish mutual trust taking into account the limitations of local legislation, which includes the obligation to pay taxes (e.g., VAT, tourist tax, capital gain taxes, etc.).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we focused on the importance and influence of sharing economy, digital platforms (e.g. TripAdvisor) and the internet connected technologies for the creation of business performance in tourism and hospitality industry.

Indeed, the young generations are adopting digital technologies rapidly. This requires from each company and managers a rethinking of what is expected or desired from the new technologies and economical concepts that they are incorporating smart technologies in their business concepts.

In a sharing economy the emerging digital media platforms have an important influence on the changes in the tourism supply chain with expanded web and social media technologies in tourism marketing strategies. The processes of knowledge management are increasingly dependent on the ability to search the collection, processing, evaluation (critical judgment) data, information and concepts which are located outside the organization: they are moving into private communities (Airbnb, Uber, Blabla, etc.). Thus, the users of tourist services spread information on their satisfaction or dissatisfaction via word of mouth (word-of-mouth-marketing) – as well as their behavior and preferences. This is ascertainable based on received coordinate information from other tourists, tourist operators, media, etc. Data transfer is made via e-mail, social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.), blogs, social networks and evaluators of websites.

The current paper represents an important theoretical contribution to the understanding of the sharing economy concept and the ICT and internet technologies.

The findings were based on the review of the literature and confirmed the assumption that the business value of the IoT technology is significantly higher than is reflected by the number of devices. The trend of sharing economy is leading toward the establishment of a communication channel (e.g. digital platforms, smart devices) for the continuous exchange of information, in more and more cases between machines themselves (e.g. smart hotel key).

Innovative ICT and internet technologies are influencing the business performance. Hospitality managers have to incorporate technological innovations in their business models.

The tourist industry should be aware that the innovative technologies, social media and digital platforms allow customer orientated offer and represent an important and low-cost framework for marketing campaigns that reach a large volume of potential guests.

At the same time, they must of course also be aware of the risks entailed by online businesses. To this end, they must provide high security for e-commerce and monitor public opinion about the hotel services in the online ecosystem and react quickly to negative reports.

The management in the tourism industry will have to accept a sharing economy as a challenge; investing in modern ICT tools and innovative technologies (e.g. IoT) has become a challenging aspect of guest-oriented business strategies.

One particular limitation of the article is that no research was made; but the intention has been to review existing literature and assess positions on the basis thereof. Further researches should be focused on the effect of this direction of technology on the ecosystem. Deeper investigation of this topic could include case study with elements of implementation, testing business benefits and social and environmental benefits with real data.

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