

THE INTERNET MARKETING: KEY STRATEGY TO ATTRACT CHINESE OUTBOUNDS TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

The number of Chinese international tourism has remarkably increased in the past two decades and still is the fastest growing tourism source market in the world. This paper aims to understand the trend in Chinese outbound travelers by identifying the political and economic circumstances in the development of Chinese outbound tourism, the characteristics and the Internet marketing as a key strategy to penetrate the Chinese Outbound Travel Market.

Keywords: Chinese Outbound Tourism, Approved Destination Status, E-Tourism, Strategy, Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the biggest industry in the world in the last decade. Information communication technologies (ICTs) and the expansion of internet have significantly changed the travel industry. E-tourism, also called electronic or numeric tourism, refers to all the activities in the field of travel and tourism on Internet. E-tourism has been developed in travel industry in the world. However, the level of e-tourism developments varies between regions, countries and continents: For more than 30 years, new technologies have been adopted in travel industry in Europe and America. To contextualize e-tourism development in China, an examination of e-commerce development in China is required. According to the survey conducted by China Internet Network Center (CNNIC), the number of internet users in China has reached 649 million by the end of 2014.

China, as a fast growing developing country in Asia, holds the record for the fastest developing major country in the history of the world. Concerning the International tourism, China is the biggest tourism market in the world. It is strongly developing these few years. China is recently positioned as the first country in terms of expenses and is gaining importance in the international tourism market. The number of outbound tourists reached 117 million in 2014. One of the reasons of the good health of the e-tourism in China is the fact that it implies two trends that are strongly developing these last years in China: the tourism and thee-business.

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International tourism is democratized in the Chinese population, and develops to reach many destinations. It was previously unauthorized by the Chinese government. Chinese tourism is now accepted in over 146 countries or regions of the world, negotiations to obtain the “ADS” (Approved Destination Status) have multiplied in recent years between foreign and Chinese government.

As tourism industry plays an important role in economy, this topic instead the Chinese population in the heart of reflection. Guide policy to promote tourism to Chinese tourists is it relevant? We hope, through the demonstration of the importance and weight of the Chinese population in tourism, observe how destinations meet new demand. Opportunities open to the Chinese middle class, which resonate as challenges to overcome.

How do professionals prepare for the likely invasion of Chinese outbound tourism and how are they prepared? What strategies and tools to use to reach them? Also, this research aims to examine how Information communication technologies (ICTs) and explores the adoption of Internet in travel organizations. Historical and sociological approaches are necessary first to understand who the new tourists are: Where do they come from, how many and who are they, where are they going, what are their capabilities, their behaviour and their expectations?

In a globalizing world, knowledge becomes a priority: this society does not quickly be called upon to play a leading role in the international community? Would a rate of sustained economic growth and the emergence of a middle class simply that give a new dynamism in the Chinese tourism industry, today become the strength development of the global tourism industry?

HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHINESE OUTBOUND TRAVELERS

For a long time, tourists from mainland China remained strangers to customs of other countries though they openly receive tourists; this is for the simple reason that international tourism has not existed in the People's Republic of China until the early 1990s. It will be important to point at the exceptional circumstances that allowed the foreign private travel of the largest population in the world to develop such as tracing the history of the first trips from the mainland and then on by analyzing the gradual introduction of Chinese outbound tourism.

THE HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES FROM LOCKING TO OPENING OF CHINA TO THE WORLD

The Chinese, with their thirst for knowledge, for new experiences, culture and shopping, are in the process of becoming the first world travellers of many countries. Since the beginning of the Dengist Era, the Chinese government has gradually released its tight grip on the population to allow its citizens to travel abroad, because it is incompatible with the requirements of the new market.

Laws restricting the mobility of Chinese in their own country, driven by the almighty hukou system (Arlt, 2008) a kind of residence booklet, have been revised. Introduced in the late 50s, this system of social control of the population remains in effect until mid-80s, to be relatively released afterwards.

This “birth certificate” booklet, given at birth, in which the name of the place of birth and class of every Chinese mobility are inscribed, made only one scenario possible: “from bottom to up and horizontally” (Pierre & Jean-Philippe, 1986). The

need for the hukou system found various justifications: for the government, it is possible to avoid an uncontrolled urbanization, but for others, he obeyed political motivations, because “it allowed to reinforce the authorities” control over the movement of the Chinese people, which hukou was initially granted, to know landowners and rich peasants.

At first, only the officials of the State, theoretically was allowed to travel in China and abroad, only for official purposes. Then, the policy of reform implementation in the early 80s, initiating a “socialist market economy” has resulted in an overall increase in the standard of living of the Chinese. Pressured citizens became affluent, willing to work wherever demand is and to discover their country. They became stronger, to compel the authorities to relieve unofficially.

Authorization to travel gradually generated intra border permits to allow the ability for Chinese tourists to move beyond boundaries. The gradual relaxation of the hukou system since the era of economic reforms has enabled the Chinese people to move first in the country, and partly to become consumers of leisure and tourist travel, then the world according to strict migration rules, framed by the agreements “ADS” (Admitted Destination Status) systematically signed between China and the countries concerned.

Emergence of a middle class

Arlt (2008), A hukou is a record in the system of household registration required by law in the People’s Republic of China (mainland China). The system itself is more properly called “huji”, and has origins in ancient China. A household registration record officially identifies a person as a resident of an area and includes identifying information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth. A hukou can also refer to a family register in many contexts since the household registration record is issued per family and usually includes the births, deaths, marriages, divorces and moves, of all members in the family.

China is a traditional agricultural society. For fifty years, and especially during the last thirty years, Chinese society has witnessed various changes, induced by the process of transformation from a traditional society to a modern society, from an agricultural society to an industrial society, as well as the conversion process from a planned economy to a market economy. These changes are reflected in changes in the structure of social classes. There were the steady declines in the number of agricultural workers since 1978. In 1978, farmers accounted for 67.4% of the workforce whereas in 1999; the number represents only 44% of the total workforce (UNWTO, 2003).

So, Chinese leave campaigns for looking for work, to township enterprises or villages, by educating more and because of the urbanization of their villages to improve their social status. Due to the annual decline in the number of farmers, lower social classes and middle classes shrink. It is the same for industrial workers for whom the modernization of enterprises and the adoption of new technologies have had a positive impact on their standard of living, by passing in the middle class, whose we are witnessing the emergence and training. The number of private entrepreneurs, managers, owners of small industrial and commercial enterprises, people working in the service, is constantly increasing. This class that controls or directly operates on the economic resources of the country will take off and growth. The number of managers and private contractors also has known continuous growth.

The explosive growth of China’s new middle class has brought sweeping economic change and social transformation. In China, the middle class is defined by

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all the people whose incomes are between 25,000 and 100,000 Yuan. Its increase was due to many factors, but perhaps the most important is that the high level of literacy of the population, also the entertainment and leisure. From 2005 to 2010, its workforce has increased by 46%. It represents 57% of the Chinese population in 2010, against 39% in 2005 (André, 2014).

The rapid growth of the middle class will be the most powerful in the development of China over the coming years, and deeply change the conditions of the planetary balance. Today, the consumption structure of urban and rural residents is dramatically changing, the proportion of spending on culture, education, tourism, recreation or sport gradually increases from 12.3% to 14% between 1999 and 2000, and urban residents aspire less survival as the search of entertainment and some development (UNWTO, 2003). To increase the development of its economy through consumption, China has introduced the concept: Paid holidays. Introduced in 1998, these holidays mark an important turning point in the evolution of Chinese tourism.

The three “Golden Weeks”, Huangjin zhou now allow a wide segment of the population to travel inside the country, and outside the Chinese border. Originally the term “Huangjin zhou” was used by the Chinese travel agencies to designate the Japanese’s holiday week of May, during which they are particularly many people to go abroad and especially in China. The term has been diverted by travel agencies to describe the Chinese official paid holidays: one week for the Spring Festival, which takes place between January and February, according to the date set by the lunar calendar, one week on the occasion of Labor Day, May 1st, one week for national day on October 1st. In general, persons belonging to upper and middle classes move at least three times during the year, both inside and outside the country, if the middle and lower classes make possible migration during the spring festival.

HISTORY OF TRAVEL FROM MAINLANDCHINA

a. Travel in in Hong Kong and Macao the source of the trips from the mainland

In 1990, China officially opened its borders, allowing its people to start visiting the world. The issuer market was initially developed to Hong Kong and Macao is growing rapidly since its inception.

Visiting relatives and friends living in Hong Kong and Macao are the source of the first trips in these British and Portuguese ex-colonies. On the 15th November 1983, in order to simplify the movement of Chinese mainland who wished to visit their relatives or friends in Hong Kong and Macao, Guangdong Provincial Travel Corporation began to organize “Tours for visiting relatives in Hong Kong and Macao”. In 1984, the State Council approved the organization of tours to Hong Kong and Macao for visiting relatives for mainland residents. This was the prelude to the outbound tourism of Chinese citizens.

In 1992, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council gave approval to Fujian Overseas Travel Corporation and Hua Min Travel Company to do this business. In 1998, the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council and the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region decided to increase the volume of tourists to Hong Kong and China International Travel Service Head Office was given approval to operate tours to Hong Kong and Macao.

On January 1st, 2002, the Hong Kong government and China National Tourism Administration decided to abolish the quota system regarding travel to Hong Kong. As a consequence, the number of travel companies increase to do

outbound travel business. Now, there are over 531 travel agencies in mainland China accredited by the CNTA to organize tours abroad, who arrange tourist trips to Hong Kong and Macao.

b. Travel in the border areas

In November 1987, China National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation gave approval to the border city of Dandong in Liaoning Province to operate one day tours to the border city of Sinuiju in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. By June 1998, the seven provinces and autonomous regions of Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, Jilin, Xinjiang, Yunnan and Guangxi have been approved by the government to operate border area travel with the Russian Federation, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Vietnam.

UNWTO notes that, after a development of twenty years, many changes have taken places with border tourism:

- More and more people who do not live in the border areas make border travels.
- The border travel routes have extended from border cities to the inland. For instance, border travel to
- D.P.R. Korea has not only extended to Pyongyang, but also reached Panmunjom at the 38th parallel, the demarcation line.
- The stay of the border tourists in the foreign countries has become longer, such as from one day to 8 days. Actually, to a certain extent, there is no big difference between border travel and outbound travel.

c. Travel to foreign countries

Travel to foreign countries by Chinese citizens has evolved from visiting relatives in foreign countries. In 1988, approved by the State Council, Chinese citizens were allowed to go to Thailand for visiting relatives and travel, provided their relatives paid for their expenses and offer guarantee for them. In October 1990, Singapore and Malaysia were added to this list, followed by the Philippines in July 1992.

On July 1st 1997, "Provisional measures concerning the administration of outbound travel of Chinese citizens at their own expenses" was jointly promulgated by the China National Tourism Administration and the Ministry of Public Security and approved by the State Council. Thus, outbound travel by Chinese citizens officially started and implemented the Approved Destination Status.

Then, the government approved new destinations for outbound travel:

- 1999: Australia, New Zealand, South Korea;
- 2000: Japan;
- 2001: Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Brunei;
- 2002: Indonesia, Malta, Turkey, Nepal, Egypt, Laos, Germany;
- 2003: Maldives, India, South Africa, Croatia, Cuba;
- 2004: Europe, Switzerland, Denmark, 10 new European countries, Tanzania, Zimbabwe
- 2012: Madagascar, Columbia

- 2013: 146 destinations around the world signed the bilateral tourism agreement with China, called Approved Destination Status “ADS”.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE TRAVELLERS

To provide a clear description of Chinese tourists traveling abroad, it is necessary to define who they are, by gender, age, socio-professional category, their reason for leaving and their mode of travel - group or individual, the duration of their stay, their spending or their type of accommodation.

Gender and age

The percentage of Chinese travellers by gender is changing. The proportion of males and females is becoming balanced. According to the statistics of tourism offices in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, from 70 to 80% of Chinese tourists were men in the late 80s and early 90s. Then the percentage of women rose year by year to reached 43.9% in 2000. The earlier Chinese travellers abroad were very often government on official missions traveling with public funds; it was therefore more men than women. Thereafter, with the increase of passengers traveling at their own expense, the proportions of men and women are becoming balanced. In Europe, there is a trend towards feminization of Chinese tourists. For example, in France, 51% of Chinese tourists are women in 2012.

Chinese travellers aged 25-44 make up 65% of all outbound travellers. This represents an important increase since 2007 when this age group accounted for around 50% of all outbound tourists. Younger tourists account for 21% of overseas travellers, while tourists aged 45 and above account for 15%. It is worth noting, however, that the latter age group accounts for a higher proportion of long-haul travellers, especially to Europe and Australia. This group is also expected to increase its share of outbound travel in the future, as the Chinese population ages.

In China, seniors are not generally willing to travel overseas due to the traditional cultural reasons and health problems. (Guo et al., 2004; Guo, Kim & Timothy, 2007) examined the reasons for the lower participation in outbound travel by people over 50 years old. First, senior residents are living frugally and like saving their money. Travel, especially overseas travel, is seen as a luxury. Second, most have retired from work and live on pensions, which may not be high enough to afford overseas travel. Third, travel agencies do not provide tailored products to this group. Finally, many elderly people lack the physical strength to travel far. Therefore, in this study, the age groups of 50-65 and over 65 were combined together in the category-over 50 years old in the following analysis. (Hsu, Cai & Wong, 2007) also found that many older people felt taking holidays was socially irresponsible, a view shaped by their childhoods in a Maoist period of China's history. However, some seniors do take holidays, when either they visit family overseas and/or their children pay for the holidays.

The rapid escalation in social and economic mobility in China has brought a relatively rapid increase in discretionary income available for travel. Chinese travellers are therefore more eager than westerners to increase their spending on travel. But Chinese travellers differ from their western counter parts in ways that are significant for the companies that serve them. For instance, demand for travel in china comes mostly from active young adults eager to visit new places, whereas demand in the west is driven by senior citizens, who tend to have more time and money for travel.

The young (18-25 years) and seniors (over 50 years) are more likely to participate less in overseas travel than middle aged groups (26-35 years and 36-49 years). In addition, people who are single are more likely to be non-participants when compared with married people. Income level plays an important role, as lower income earners (under RMB 5,000) are less likely to participate in overseas travel. A more plausible explanation, again, could be the high correlations among age, marital status and income. Single people are mostly young with relatively lower income, and the individuals usually earn their highest levels of income in their middle or senior years. With regard to occupation, company employees and managers are more likely to be participants. On the other hand, students are mostly unlikely to take overseas vacations due to lower incomes and perhaps because of time pressures.

While outbound travel for Chinese mainland citizens is still dominated by group tours, its growth is slowing when compared to the meteoric rise of independent tourism. Fully independent outbound tourism is growing even faster than foreign travel in general, and the market is still in its infancy.

The six characteristics that define this next generation of Chinese travellers

- Younger: 60% are in the consumer “sweet spot” between 25 and 45 years old.
- Richer: Over 80% have an annual income over 60,000 RMB. The average for urban consumers is 24,000 RMB.
- More educated: The vast majority at least have bachelor's degrees.
- More sophisticated travelers: Fully independent tourists usually aren't on their first trip abroad.
- Many study or have studied in other countries. Even when they aren't fluent in foreign languages, they aren't afraid to deal with locals on their own.
- Younger Chinese are worldlier than their parents, but still proudly Chinese more connected: The internet is the main source of information for independent tourists. They see internet and social networking access as a major necessity. They often consult friends for travel advice and use first-hand travelogues in blogs when planning a trip.
- Demanding: This whole generation of only children that grew up in relative abundance is accustomed to high quality and attentive service.

Modes of travel

Outbound tourism by Chinese citizens is a recent phenomenon (Zhang, Chon, Lew, Ap & Yu, 2003). Before China's economic reform and openness to the outside world, the purpose of Chinese overseas travel was primarily related to foreign affairs with an annual outbound departure of 2 million.

Strictly speaking, this was more in the nature of diplomatic activity rather than outbound tourism in a real sense. Chinese visitors usually travel in a tour group because of restrictions placed on individual travellers by both the Chinese and destination's governments. Group travel remains the preferred mode of travel for Chinese tourists in both Asia and Europe. If this mode of travel is now selected in Asia, group travel is imposed in Europe. The vast majority of Chinese tourists traveling in groups: 70% according to a latest report of the tourism agency of China. This number tends to decrease but still remain strong for many reasons:

- Language barrier: many Chinese do not speak English or French prefer traveling with a guide.

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- The issues visa: Agencies take care of everything and facilitate obtaining a VISA.
- Fear of adventure for the most part they have never been out of China, the travellers are inexperienced, and naturally afraid of the unknown.
- Group: Chinese like to be in a group, influence of Asian culture. For reasons-price travel with a travel agency is much cheaper than from single or small group.

It is a trend that the percentage of group tourists is decreasing. According to the Statistics of Singapore Tourism Board, in 1993, Chinese group tourists made up 73%. The figure dropped to 56.6% in 1997. It was 60.4% in 2000. The statistics of Macao Government Tourism Office show the percentage of group tourists from the mainland. In 1995, it was 78%; in 1996 it was 67.2%; in 1997 the figure was 67.6%; in 1998 it became 58.15% and it dropped to 36.5% in 1999. In France, 51% of Chinese tourists are women (2012) and 49% of them traveling alone and addicted to luxury shopping (Thierry, 2012).

CHINESE TRAVELERS: THE BIGGEST INTERNATIONAL TOURISM SPENDER

Expenditures by Chinese travellers are exponentially increasing. Between 2000 and 2012, expenditure abroad of Chinese tourists was multiplied by eight, as the number of international travel, which increased from 10 million to 83 million over the past twelve years. The purchasing power of Chinese tourists is also higher than that of Americans (**Table 1**).

In two years, Chinese tourists could be spending as much as \$194 billion a year in Europe, the US, Asia and other vacation spots. That figure speaks of the appreciation of their currency and the growing economic clout of China's middle class. In 2012, Chinese travellers became the world's biggest spenders, shelling out about \$102 billion overseas, 40% more than 73 billion in 2011 and \$ 48 billion in 2010. According to a new report by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Chinese travellers are now the top source of tourism cash in the world.

Table 1. World's Top Tourism Spenders.

Rank		International Tourism Expenditure (US\$ billion)			
		2005	2010	2011	2012
1	China	21,8	54,9	72,6	102,0
2	Germany	74,4	78,1	85,9	83,8
3	United States	69,9	75,5	78,7	83,7
4	United Kingdom	59,6	50,0	51,0	52,3
5	Russian Federation	17,3	26,6	32,5	42,8
6	France	31,8	39,0	44,1	38,1
7	Canada	18,0	29,6	33,3	35,2
8	Japan	27,3	27,9	27,2	28,1
9	Australia	11,3	22,2	26,7	27,6
10	Italy	22,4	27,1	28,7	26,2

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Expenditure by Chinese tourists abroad has almost quintupled since 2005, with China becoming the biggest international tourism spender in 2012, surpassing Germany and the United States of America. They spend so much abroad that some foreigners are calling them “**walking wallets**”. In 2010, half of all Chinese tourists spent at least CNY 5,000 in their outbound trips.

Boosted by a rising Chinese currency, Chinese travellers spent a record US\$102 billion on international tourism in 2012, a 40 percent rise from US\$ 72,6 billion in 2011. The main reasons for high spending Chinese are as follows:

- A trip abroad is still a majority of Chinese first trip outside China. Those from inland regions and border areas will not leave for some time, so they are willing to spend a lot of money during their stay.
- The Chinese are good money savers: they constantly put money aside to willingly spend on a trip. According to the legislation of the Chinese government, every person who goes abroad is entitled to withdraw from the bank U.S. \$ 5000 in cash (from 1 September 2003), the development of international Chinese bank cards also facilitates consumption to abroad. Chinese currency is accepted in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and Macao, though tourists from Mainland China rather spend less in these areas (**Table 2**).
- Chinese from Mainland China are fond of shopping and love above all major brands. They also enjoy local products such as fabrications crocodile skin Thailand Gold & Silver Hong Kong, Australia wool, luxury bags in Europe, etc. European products are particularly fashionable, quality products of the most famous European brands are recognized in Europe and their prices are significantly lower than those in China.

Table 2. China Outbound Tourism 2000-2014 (in million border-crossings).

2000	2001	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
10,5	12,1	31,0	57,4	70,3	83,2	97	117

Sources: COTRI, CNTA, CTA

Chinese tourists: Off season Customers

In general, the demand in terms of tourism services is growing: The composition of this demand is constantly changing for several years, and this demand generally influences the timing and space rentals. (Maddison, 2000). The rapid growth of tourism demand is caused by an increase in leisure time, partly due to an aging population, along with a general increase in the purchasing power of households. (Institute of Touristic Studies, 2003). This parallel increase in income and leisure time is an explanatory cause of the growing number of Chinese tourists. Anyway, there is a period defined for the displacement of Chinese tourists.

For Chinese travellers, these trips happen most often during the “low” and “off season”, towards Europe as the largest destination region. Based on the WTO definition “seasonality is attending a site or a device on a season or part of the year due, in part, to the specificity of a site or equipment and secondly, the constraint of the school calendar and dates of paid holidays.”

This definition of seasonality, ultimately gives us three types of tourist seasons, based on different levels of annual travel. These seasons are three fold: First, the high season tourism having a maximum occupancy level; second, the low season which refers to a small number of visitors and revenue; third, the average season is almost similar to the high season months, but with an occupancy level of

approximately 60 % (UNWTO, 2001). Based on climatic phenomena but also the dates of national school holidays, the summer months have traditionally been the month to go on vacation. (Markant, 1991). For most tourists, the main traveling season is still the summer months (July and August) going to mainly Europe, United States, Canada and the others country (Familitur, 2003). It is recognized that tourism seasonality has two origins: the first is known as natural seasonality and the second, institutional seasonality (Baron, 1976).

For China, the origin of tourism seasonality is institutionalized and is based on Chinese culture: The main travelling periods for tour groups sold by travel agents are around the two remaining national holiday periods: the so-called “Golden Weeks”. These are the Spring Festival during the Chinese New Year and the National Day Holiday (first week in October). January or February is the most popular month, depending on when the Chinese New Year falls as this is the major holiday period for Chinese travellers.

In general, Chinese travellers visit Europe “out of the tourist season”, the largest destination region for them with over 3 million trips (4.4%) in 2011. The Americas follows with almost 2 million (2.7%) Chinese departures, while Africa was the destination of almost 1 million departures (1.4%). They prefer to go in the spring, during the Chinese New Year or in autumn during their holidays. The main issues in the tourism sector are to fill the gaps of activity and Chinese tourists in my opinion are a perfect complement activity for the majority of enterprises in tourism. The rapid escalation in social and economic mobility in china has brought a relatively rapid increase income available for travel. Chinese travellers are therefore more eager than westerners to increase their spending on travel.

Chinese people are connected, especially the urban ones. The Internet provides direct access to consumers, and is also a tool for business to business communication. Increasingly, it will provide consumers and intermediaries with far richer information, increased choice and the facility to make bookings immediately. It will also offer tourism organizations and businesses the tools to promote, communicate and transact with consumers and other tourism businesses.

INTERNET: KEY STRATEGY TO ATTRACT CHINESE OUTBOUNDS TOURISTS

The fast development of Information Communication technologies and indeed the expansion of the internet have changed industry structures around the world. It is common sense that the technological development has affected to the global tourism industry. “Communication network satellites provide the quickest and the cheapest data transfer to all parts of the world, a great agreement among thousands of computer systems that communicate with each other is represented by the Internet.” (Kent, 1994).

New technologies have been adopted in the tourism industry in America and Europe for more than 30 years, and the trend is likely to continue into the future. The internet is quickly becoming the preferred channel of communication by millions of people all over the world, and in business it is a fast, global, and inexpensive way of reaching customers. Through the internet there are many services available, everything from searching for information, electronic newspapers and e-mail to discussion groups and ordering of goods and service.

According to China, as a fast-growing developing country in Asia, is gaining importance in the international tourism market. Its population starts travelling overseas. In 2014, China outbound tourists reached 117 million, an increase of 19.16% over 2013. Chinese visitors made great contributions to the development of outbound destinations in many aspects during the year, including hotels, restaurants, attractions, airlines and retail.

E-commerce development and expansion of electronic market in China have attracted travel organization to employ e-commerce in their business as internet has become a new intermediary in travel industry, which brings both challenges and opportunities to travels organizations. In fact, travel and Tourism industry has been particularly affected by the great advancement and the wide application of e-commerce in business.

THE DEFINITION AND CONCEPT OF E-TOURISM

The term “E-tourism” is used to refer to e-business in the field of travel and tourism industry. Also, this term includes the use of the information and communications technologies i.e. the use of ICT to enable tourism providers and destinations to operate more efficiently, and to reach and serve consumers more effectively with facilities to search, compare and book tourism products.

E-business not only embraces the use of new media, such as the Internet and e-mail, but also enables more efficient use of traditional media such as brochures and advertising. It incorporates the ability to conduct sales online, with fundamental implications for the way businesses work. E-business has the potential to transform the way in which businesses or organization’s function, through integrating systems for management of stock or availability (eg. of hotel rooms), procurement of supplies, financial administration, marketing, sales and other transactions.

The e-tourism can offer many benefits for the organization and the consumers. Which will create value in the tourists business, the creation of tourist products and the bidirectional benefits for the businesses and the consumers:

- ❖ For the consumers the benefits are: Easy accessibility in the information and global tourism products and services. Today the consumers can have access in a huge number of information about the tourism product and services for free anytime from many locations in the World Wide Web: The consumer see the tourism web pages as on line brochure for data collection (for example attractions, costs comments etc). In addition, through the internet the consumers have the ability to exchange information through the virtual communities. In addition, the reports from the internet can be integrated because usually are accompanied with photos, information about the weather conditions, common comments from other tourists in the virtual communities (forums etc). The only condition for the use of this capability is the accessibility to the internet.
- ❖ For the tourist industry businesses can bring:
 - Creation of new markets or expands the existing. That is become because the global accessibility if the internet. Any hotel, agency etc can be advertised, contact with the distant customers.
 - Low costs. The e-tourism adoption for many business of tourist industry can decrease the costs of products (for example the decreasing or elimination of middlemen) increasing the number of tourists.

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- Loyalty affairs through e-commerce affairs. These affairs are succeed through the continuous contact and the provision of services with the customers. This continuous contact has as a result the creation of strong relationships with the customers who acquire trust about the tourist business (through the matching services for example the provision of Customer Relationship Management).
- The service provider's (such as hotels, airlines, ferry companies) sells "space" (unsold tickets, rooms) that otherwise would be left empty. The direct sell gives the capabilities to provider to spare supplies, collection of information etc.
- Continuous Improvement of the Quality of Services. The services which provides the e-tourism is separated in three kinds: 1) Information services, 2) Communication Services, 3) Transaction services. All of them are operated based on the internet. The continuous improvement of the internet technologies means that will be continuous improvement of the matching services.
- Improvement of the general profile and the competitive capability of the company. The presentence of a company on the internet upgrade the business to the sector of e-business.
- Real time provision information and automated services through portals and web pages and "tools" such as search engineers.
- Financial benefits through the activation of a tourist company in the parallel market of e-tourism.

Internet, the first Media in China

Under the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, citizens enjoy freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Since the economic reforms in the 1980s, China's media are diversifying more and more with the economic development. China's media primarily consists of television, radio, newspaper and internet: Currently, China lists nearly 2000 newspapers, over 9000 periodicals, 267 radio stations and 342 TV stations (Barnett, 2011) (**Table 3**).

Since the mid-1990s, China's internet media have been developing rapidly. In 2014, China's internet users have reached 648 million and still growing, according to a report released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), a non profit administrative agency under China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT). That number is double the U.S. population of 316 million. China's Internet user base grew by 30 million from its 2013 level of 618 million. It also grew by 84 million from its December 2012 level of 564 million, according to statistics from CNNIC.

Today roughly 46.8 percent of China's population has access to the Internet. CNNIC's figures do not reflect mobile Internet users. There were 1.286 billion cell phone users and 875.2 million mobile Internet users in China in December 2014, according to statistics from MIIT.

In China, Traditional media are rapidly losing ground to online media. This year 2015, 50.4% Chinese adults have spent half of their time per day on online media, against 48.5% in 2014.

Table 3. Share of average time spent per day with major media by adults in China 2011-2015 % of total.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Digital	35.8%	40.5%	45.4%	48.5%	50.4%
			%	%	
Mobile (non-voice)	15.4%	21.0%	26.9%	30.7%	32.9%
			%	%	
- Smartphone	7.3%	12.5%	16.3%	18.8%	20.3%
			%	%	
- Tablet	1.7%	3.4%	6.5%	8.4%	9.5%
- Feature phone	6.4%	5.1%	4.1%	3.5%	3.1%
- Desktop/Laptop	20.4%	19.4%	18.6%	17.8%	17.4%
			%	%	
TV	55.5%	51.7%	47.6%	45.1%	43.6%
			%	%	
RADIO	3.7%	3.6%	3.4%	3.2%	3.1%
Print	4.9%	4.3%	3.6%	3.2%	2.9%
- Newspapers	4.4%	3.9%	3.2%	2.8%	2.6%
- Magazines	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%

²China National Tourism Administration, online link: Culture chinoise: Les Medias, http://www.otchine.com/Culture_Chinoise_1_Les_medias.htm

Note: ages 18+; time spent with each medium includes all time spent with that medium, regardless of multitasking; for example, 1 hour of multitasking on desktop/laptop while watching TV is counted as 1 hour for TV and 1 hour for desktop/laptop; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *includes all internet activities on desktop and laptop computers; ** excludes digital

Source: eMarket, June 2015

China's internet market revolution

Information communication technologies (ICTs) continue to gain momentum around the world, benefiting from the continued decline in the price of telephone and broadband internet services. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a United Nations body, predicts that 3.2 billion people will be online in 2015.

An Internet User is defined as an individual who has access to the Internet at home, via computer or mobile device. With 1.38 billion people, China is currently the world's most populous country. It is the largest media market in the world and has the world's largest and fastest growing online population. China has more internet users than any other country putting it ahead of the United States as the world's biggest Internet market: With 648 million internet users at the end of 2014 (China Internet Network Information Centre, CNNIC), China represents nearly 22% of all internet users in the world. After China, the U.S. has the second largest number of Internet users, with 280 million, followed by India (243 million) and Japan (109 million), according to data compiled by the World Bank and United Nations amongst others.

Despite the huge number and rapid growth of connectivity, the overall population size means that still a majority (52.1%) of Chinese have no access to the internet. China holds the first place in terms of online shoppers: 242 million people

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in China were doing the online shoppers. Online shopping taking up almost in various areas and it grows too in Popularity in Rural China.

The Chinese market is technologically savvy with over 648 million regular internet users today and an estimated online audience of 778.2 million by 2018. This strong growth in internet usage has led more Chinese to rather book their travel online instead of traditional way. In 2010, online travel bookings in China reached 6.2 billion, a 58 per cent increase from 3.9 billion in 2009. By 2014, online travel bookings are expected to exceed 20 billion. The internet was the most popular source of information for Chinese travellers.

It should be noted that the Chinese travellers do not speak much English nor French. They only use their mother tongue. It is therefore essential for the tourism industry (hotels, incoming agency and destination) to offer services tailored to Chinese customers. So, Chinese language websites attracted more Chinese travellers. Thus, a company wishing to attract Chinese tourists must have a website, always in the Chinese language, adapted to the needs and habits of the Chinese. The website in Chinese language must also be optimized to open access to Chinese internet search which usually block Western internet.

Search engines are different, and the leading search engine in China is Baidu. Having a site hosted in China is not only important to be able to respond to censorship, but also for the download speed of your pages, as well as the optimal indexation in search engine Baidu has more than 80% market share in China. It is therefore necessary to optimize the website for Baidu and then work on referencing it. SEO is a very good way to attract the targeted users who do these searches. SEO is to perform work on the keywords and content of the website, then bring them up with external links and link exchanges with other sites.

This reinforces the importance of providing consumers with informative and easy access to online options. Online distribution of travel products and services may be the opportunity for service providers in developing countries access to tourism markets international, directly targeting potential tourists like Chinese travellers.

Most consumers use the Internet to search for travel information. ICTs also help destinations and providers of tourist services to develop, manage and sell their offerings worldwide. In connection with the reorganization of the tourism market, the effective use of ICT could enable developing countries to build their own brand, to develop new products, promote their tourism resources and increase their base consumers to increase foreign tourism revenues and contribute to local development. The application of ICT in industry- driven information as a key business driver for the organization and marketing of destinations developing countries illustrates the potential of ICT for economic and social development. In fact, the Internet can be divided into several categories: website, forums, social networks, online advertising.

Websites

China has the world's biggest online presence. Tourism companies cannot be perceived as market leaders if they do not have a web presence. They thus are making efforts to move more business activities online to best meet the requirements of Chinese customer for online service, because online services are attracting customers and guiding tourism activities.

An online tourism service can be characterized under seven functions: general tourism service information publicity; advertising tourism product or service;

advertising tourism product/price with price information; email enquiry for tourism information and service; online booking for tourism product and service; online payment; tourism web site registration with user ID.

Web site should offer more functions: Presenting scenic information, tourism news, offer special local product and souvenir information, provide email address to allow customers to make enquiries about products and services, provide brochures map and other associated tourism information. The web site can offer online booking, including room booking and ticket booking.

Tourism companies should use the web to build customer relationships by having customers register directly and then getting information from customers to create customer profiles that can be used in new tourism product development. The tourism web site content could have a promotional direction and a customer oriented design. They could help users in finding “Where to go”, “Where to stay”, “what to do”, “How to go there” and, in general plan a trip. So, the characteristics of tourism web site should be: Very helpful, trustworthy, dependable, reliable and ensure that the information content provided on the web is useful, up to date and can meet customers need and link relevant sites to users.

In general, a tourism activity involves the six basic tourism elements: Eating, accommodations, traveling, wandering, relaxation and shopping. Tourism web site users would like to get relevant information for the six elements from a destination web site before they go on tour. Tourism web site thus should be built with sufficient links to other relevant sites and have the ability to develop various packages that integrate a group of relevant services.

In China, there are two categories of tourists: private and group travelers. The two categories of tourists have different travel purposes and requirements concerning travel and accommodation. Tourism websites thus are expected to offer services to different target groups of tourists.

The first key factor for developing a successful online application is to correctly define users' requirements. Allowing users to email requests and replying to questions on time are important functions in web site design and an effective way to attract online customers. This is also a strategy of business management. The third most important factor for a successful tourism is a good information interaction. An interaction function is important to allow sharing experiences capture valuable information and taking part in consultations. A lot of users are interested in online chat, online consultation and email facilities. The users prefer a combination of information content such as a tourism guide and community involvement such as a web consultation. Normally, Chinese travellers like to get other opinion of scenic places before they go on tour. They thus wish to talk with other tourists via the web sites. Tourism web sites are expected to provide an interactive space to customers and service providers. Customers would like to share ideas, experiences, opinions and suggestions with others online.

Social networking sites

Facebook is an online social networking service and the world's largest social network, but the Chinese are not allowed to use Facebook. The fact that China's government control outgoing information is not just technological but rather economical.

China's government exerts control over every significant business in the country. Companies in China must be majority owned by a Chinese citizen and even

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then are heavily regulated by the government. All the major corporations in China, including telecommunications and media companies, are state owned entities or are majority owned by the state. Because China's government has instituted a strict system of controls over Internet usage in the country and has blocked access to many Western social media websites via the Great Firewall of China, it is also one of the most unique social media markets (**Table 4**). This exerts a significant level of state influence on how people receive and send information.

Facebook is the world's largest social network, but to appreciate its feat, we also need to know what the most famous social networking sites in China against it because Chinese social media sites have become popular tools to reach Chinese consumers.

Table 4. The top 10 social networking sites in China.

Rank	Social network	Number of active users (in Million)
1	Tencent QQ	830
2	Qzone	755
3	Sina weibo	600
4	Wechat	468
5	Pengyou	260
6	51.com	200
7	Ren Ren	195
8	Jiayuan	120
9	Kaixin 001	113
10	Douban	75

Source: Jamie Spencer, Chinese social media statistics³

Social media plays a particularly important role in China and its ongoing transformation due to a number of unique factors. First, the country not only has the world's largest populace, but it also has the world's largest number of social media users. Second, Chinese society is experiencing an unprecedented historical change and social media is an indispensable and unreplaceable catalyst of change. Third, both social media in China and the Chinese socio-political and cultural context have many significantly unique characteristics. Forth, the continuing fast growth of social media use and the constant, yet unpredictable social change taking place in China simply but clearly mean that in the Era of Social Media the country is and will be confronted everyday with more new and tough challenges.

A part from that, social media plays an important role in e-commerce in order to create brand awareness by means of advertisements. In China, social media platforms enable companies to create, publish and promote their brands in an efficient way. The main advantage of social networks is its power to connect³<http://www.setupablogtoday.com/chinese-social-media-statistics/brands> with their potential customers. Brands can develop their personality through a constant social media presence to engage with their consumers in a deeper way which will boost customers towards your brand. Nonetheless, in order to be effective, brands need to be really engaged.

Through social networks such as RenRen, QQ, WeChat, Weibo or Q Zone, companies are able to create adverts and locate them on targeted member's profiles. Chinese culture is indeed largely based on social ties and shared, and this phenomenon still has more scope on the internet. Considering that 91% of Chinese internet users have at least one account on one of China's leading social networks. This link is also a very powerful marketing lever: Chinese internet users connect to social networks of enterprises and the quality of this relationship is of crucial importance in the purchase decision.

For Chinese, social networks play an important role in almost all areas, especially in the field of tourism because Chinese consumer generally has no great experience of traveling abroad; it is suspicious to provide much needed information prior to the travel.

Obviously, consumer will start asking relatives (family and friends), but the main purpose of these searches will happen on the Internet. He goes on to compare prices services and destinations. For a Chinese tourist, there is no better advice than that of another Chinese tourist: Social ties and the sharing worth all communication campaigns. That is why the establishment of a digital communication based on sharing by users is an essential lever. In addition, Chinese social networks are particularly suited to this type of viral communication. Chinese tourists have the particularity to take a lot of photos, but also to publish these photos, memories and experiences feedbacks of Chinese travellers, on the internet. They generally share their experiences by posting their photos, at least on the one of Chinese social networks. This is an invaluable resource for all Chinese internet users who prepare their trips.

When analysing the e-tourism sector in China, we notice that 3 major players share the market, such as: Ctrip, Qunar, Elong. They have each launched an application on their smartphones, allowing users to have a better user experience when booking their trips from their phones because nearly 80% of Internet users are only on their smartphones.

CONCLUSION

This paper has offered some valuable insight into studies on E-tourism, (also called electronic or numeric tourism), that is increasing rapidly in China. It represents all the activities of tourism on Internet. Internet technology is an important "communication channel" between offer and demand in modern tourism. With the help of the Internet, there is an opportunity for all operators in tourism industry to successfully promote and sell services and products and to act in accordance with desires and needs of modern consumers. In modern travel agencies business, the Internet has proven to be an effective medium for tourism promotion and sales, so distribution of products and services no longer depends on the quantity of printed catalogues and brochures, but information on tourism products and services can reach millions of Internet users, and overbooking has become almost impossible because all communication problems have been removed. Marketing activities occupy an important place in the business strategies of modern travel agency, where the Internet has recently become an essential part of media planning. It can be concluded that modern Internet technologies help travel agencies in creating a unique identity, increasing efficiency and developing value-added services.

One of the reasons of the good health of the e-tourism in China is the fact that it implies two trends that are strongly developing these last years in China: the tourism and the e-business. China has the most important number of active users on

Internet 648 million connected Chinese. In general, China is a late adopter of innovation as regards to the adoption of e-commerce in tourism industry.

E-tourism has been a growing trend in China. Though online channel offers more opportunities for the travel service providers and online intermediaries, they still need the cooperation with travel agents in their online bookings services. So, travel agency still keeps the main travel service delivery channel in China.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author confirms that this article content has no conflict of interests.

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