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Study about customer preferences in using online tourism products

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Abstract

Holidays and leisure services are usually bought without experiencing them first, so buying them online is not so different from offline experience. For this reason, Internet has become an essential marketing tool for the tourism industry. The purpose of the study is to find why Romanians use Internet, if they practice tourism recently and what type of tourism, reasons for using the online for different types of tourism products, their preference for the online or offline tourism based on different criteria, the share of online consumed tourism. The results of the paper have implications for target marketing strategies designed for business environment, travel destination areas, services, and facilities and also for tourism organizations.

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1. Introduction

The accelerating and synergistic interaction between technology and tourism in recent times has brought fundamental changes in the industry and on our perceptions of its nature. In the book *Successful Web Marketing for the Tourism and Leisure Sectors* 2001:30, Bringsgs suggested that holidays and leisure services

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The revolutionary development of information technology has dramatically changed society and people's everyday lives, including the way travelers search for information and plan trips. Several studies show that the Internet has become one of the most important information sources for travel information acquisition D.-Y. Kim et al. 2007.

The growing acceptance and use of the Internet as an increasingly valuable travel tool has tourism and hospitality businesses taking a critical look at their business-to-customer online environments Mills and Law, 2004. From the consumers' point of view e-shopping offers not only time/ place convenience and enhance value through price comparisons, but also hedonic consumption possibilities as shopping experience themselves can also be rich in consumer value Sigala, 2004. Christou and Kassianidis 2002 study indicated that the advantages and disadvantages of physical efforts and time pressure related to traditional in-store travel agency shopping positively influence consumer's perception of the characteristics of e-shopping. Consumers' perception of the relative advantage and compatibility of electronic travel shopping positively influence their intention to adopt e-shopping.

Buhalis and Law 2008 made a review on the transformation on tourism globally because of the developments of Information Communication Technologies ICTs. The main changes comparing to offline tourism are: ICTs enable travelers to access reliable and accurate information; assist in the improvement of the service quality; the "new" tourist is becoming knowledgeable and is seeking exceptional value for money and time; changed tourism consumer behavior dramatically; information search is a significant part of the purchase decision process and was revolutionized as a result of the Internet; not only reduce uncertainty and perceived risks but also enhance the quality of trips; the Internet have changed travelers' behavior; tourists who searched on the Internet tended to spend more at their destinations as compared to those who consult other information sources; virtual communities are gradually becoming incredibly influential in tourism as consumers increasingly trust better their peers, rather than marketing messages; introduced the concept of social networking/virtual communities and applies it to the tourism industry; increased the number of choices for consumers; provide a very effective mechanism for consumers complaints; lead to better personalization, customization, and interaction between consumers and tourism organizations; changed dramatically the market conditions for tourism organizations; provide new tools for tourism marketing and management; re-engineer the entire process of developing, managing and marketing tourism products and destinations.

European Commission report for the tourism industry, published in March 2012 suggests that 24% of Romanians consult Internet when planning a trip or holiday. Romania is among countries that use the least this source of information, together with Serbia 7% and Macedonia 21%. Most Romanians take into account the recommendations of friends, colleagues and family in deciding travel destination 51%. However 26% of Romanians have used the Internet when planning a trip <http://evisionturismdotcom.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/rezultatele-eurobarometrului-si-tendinte-pentru-piata-romaneasca/>. The recently published yStats.com reports highlights that in 2015, there are expected to be nearly 3 billion Internet users worldwide, up from 2 billion in 2011. Global B2C E-Commerce sales reached between USD 400 and 600 billion between EUR 300 and EUR 450 million in 2010 and between USD 700 and 950 billion is expected for 2013. Until 2013, Asia's share on global B2C E-Commerce sales is projected to increase. <http://ystats.com/en/reports/preview.php?reportId=887>. Central Europe and Western Europe are advanced B2C E-Commerce market. In Eastern Europe, there is huge potential for growth. Czech Republic, Poland and Russia all recorded double-digit growth rates in B2C E-Commerce between 2009 and 2010. According to Eurostat http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ec_ibuy&lang=en, nearly 60% of Internet users in Europe shopped online; the proportion of e-shoppers among Internet users ranged from 79% in the United Kingdom to 9 % in Romania. Even during economic instability, the online trading industry has kept a growing rate of two-digit and remains a developing market, exceeding 150 million euro per year in Romania.

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