

COMPARISON BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE TOURISM USING ASSOCIATION TECHNIQUES

Cosma Smaranda ¹, Năstase Carmen ², Bota Marius ¹, Tutunea Mihaela ¹

¹ Department of Hospitality Services, Faculty of Business, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

² Department of Management, Business Administration and Tourism, Faculty of Economics and Public Administration, Universitatea Ştefan cel Mare, Suceava, Romania
smaranda.cosma@tbs.ubbcluj.ro
carmenn@seap.usv.ro
marius.bota@tbs.ubbcluj.ro
mihaela.tutunea@tbs.ubbcluj.ro

Abstract:

Travel and tourism is one of the most dynamic and successful sector in the globalising world. 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. Several studies show that the Internet has become one of the most important information sources for travel information acquisition. The present paper is focused on a better understanding of tourist behaviors in online versus offline. For investigations it was used exploratory research through qualitative approach. The word association technique from projective techniques it was considered appropriate for this research. It was used Chinese portrait technique to explain deeply the difference between traditional tourism and online tourism and the reasons of preferring mostly use a form or another. The study reveals that the personality of the respondents is almost identical with the constructed profile of online tourism. Interestingly, the remaining associations are found between those assigned to offline tourism. This result was expected because in the sample are even persons that use only offline tourism. These identified profiles have many implications both for further scientific researches, but especially for all actors involved in tourism activities. After consulting the main sources of literature references the present study can be considered one of first researches on online tourism in Romania. The study provides empirical support for identifying features and motivations of online customers and behavioural characteristics of users of online tourism products. The results offer managerial implications for business environment, travel destination areas, services, and facilities and also for tourism organizations.

Keywords: online tourism, behavioural differentiation, Chinese portrait technique.

JEL classification: L83

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. Briggss (2001:30) suggested that holidays and leisure services are usually bought without experiencing them first, so buying them online is not so different from offline experience. The Internet-based electronic commerce has evolved considerably. Physical goods, digital products and services have been sold online increasingly (Peng, XU, Chen, 2013). The revolutionary development of information technology has dramatically changed society and people's everyday lives, including the way travellers 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).

Travel and tourism products are ideal for marketing on the Internet because of their intangibility. Online tourism has successfully emerged as a platform that enables direct bookings, electronic payments, Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Consumer (B2C) trading among product marketers, travel agents, resellers and customers. Internet and related developments have been quite instrumental in growth of online tourism and online economy (Dixit, Belwal, Singh, 2006).

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). 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. In 2011 Sigala pointed out that Web 2.0 technologies are having a tremendous impact on the decision-making process, consumer behaviour and buying power and influence of Internet users.

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 travellers 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 behaviour dramatically; *information search* is a significant part of the purchase decision process and was revolutionised as a result of the Internet; not only reduce uncertainty and perceived risks but also enhance the quality of trips; the Internet have changed travellers' behaviour; 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 personalisation, customisation, and interaction between consumers and tourism organisations; changed dramatically the market conditions for tourism organisations; provide new tools for tourism marketing and management; re-engineer the entire process of developing, managing and marketing tourism products and destinations.

In the article of Yoo and Gretzel (2011) personality has been found to be a particularly influential trait that predicts behaviour. The results indicated that travellers' personality traits significantly influence perceived barriers to content creation, motivations to engage in creation behaviours. *The increasing presence of the Internet as an instrument for advertising travel destinations and travel-related services highlights its importance as a factor in travellers' decision-making processes. The investigation suggested that Internet "users," when compared with "nonusers," are more educated, have higher household incomes, use commercial lodging accommodations while travelling, tend to travel by air, and spend more money on travel-related expenses on a per diem basis (Bonn et al. 1998).* Significant differences between females and males in terms of attitudes toward travel Website functionality and scope as well as actual online information search behaviour (D.-Y. Kim et al. 2007).

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 (<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. Understanding tourist behaviors in online tourism is a key to understand target marketing. The purpose of the study is to find connection between respondents' features and online and offline tourism characteristics using Chinese portrait. *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. The study leads to a deeper understanding of customers' features, behaviour and attitudes.*

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is focused on a better understanding of tourist behaviors in online versus offline. For investigations it was used exploratory research through qualitative approach. It was considered appropriate for research projective techniques using word association technique. Data were collected by means of primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were obtained through published and statistical studies and extensive web sites analysis. Primary data were gained through survey conducting personal (face to face) interview based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in two parts. The first one contains eleven questions which offer specific information. There were used structured questions for basic information for the research and unstructured questions for Chinese portrait technique of online versus offline tourism and respondent features. The second part include questions used for the classifications of the respondents (the age of the respondents; the gender; their education; their occupation; their monthly average income; residence).

Because the aim of a study is primarily explorative, qualitative and descriptive, the research uses snowball sampling that offers practical advantages (Hendricks, Blanken and Adriaans, 1992) such as social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts. Snowball samplings is a more formal methodology for making inferences about a population of individuals who have been difficult to enumerate through the use of descending methods such as household surveys (Snijders, 1992; Faugier and Sergeant, 1997).

The authors used an online research portal in order to collect the data. iSondaje.ro is a popular web site support created to sustain research in different academic fields. For data collecting the authors chose to encourage students to respond and use their social network to fill in the online questionnaire including friends and relatives to assure the age and gender, personality different buying habits and behavioural diversity. The research was conducted during the period of November 2011 – November 2013. A number of 346 valid questionnaires were collected using this sampling technique.

3. FINDINGS

For a deeper understanding of online tourism customers the authors have used association technique. A Chinese Portrait, also called personification technique is a projective technique using an abstract artistic depiction of a person. Respondents complete several sentences of the form "If I were a(n) X, I would be..." to provide insight into the way they feel. This technique is used mostly in creative thinking, being

appropriate for perceptual mapping, attitudinal/motivational, focused/depth or image testing. The authors have chosen this technique because it can explain customer decision and behaviour based on his/her personality.

Responses to these questions were grouped in Table 1. Because of the diversity of answers, particular to qualitative research, the authors retain for the present research only the answers with the highest frequency from each category. It was possible to consider only those answers because interesting was that the following answers were at considerable distance from other. The results can be considered the main features of online/ offline tourism from the respondents point of view. In plus, the research reveals important features and behavioural attitudes of tourists.

Table 1: Chinese portrait results and interpretation. Respondents versus Chinese portrait for online/ offline tourism

Online tourism	Offline tourism
Colour: blue (sensitive, emotional and lonely) Animal: dog (friendly, vigilant, hunted) Season: summer (warm, happiness, holiday) Education: higher education (knowledge, credibility) Destination: Europe (hope, better life) Part of the body: hand/ arm (helpful tool) Punctuation: ! (surprised, astonished)	Colour: green (personalities 'green' love to help others) Animal: cat (beautiful, can be dangerous, flattery) Season: winter (cold, stay home) Education: secondary education (yes or no answers) Destination: Romania (mediocrity, safety) Part of the body: leg (stability, reality) Punctuation: ? (interrogation-answer)
Respondents	
Colour: blue/green (sensitive, emotional and lonely/ love to help others) Animal: dog/lion/cat (friendly, vigilant, hunted/ lion – powerful/ beautiful, can be dangerous, flattery) Season: summer (warm, happiness, holiday) Education: higher education (knowledge, credibility) Destination: Europe, Romania (hope, better life/ mediocrity, safety) Part of the body: head/ brain (independent, make decisions on their own) Punctuation: ! (surprise, astonished)	

Source: made by authors

The study reveals that the personality of the respondents is almost identical with the constructed profile of online tourism. Interestingly, the remaining associations are found between those assigned to offline tourism. This result was expected because in the sample are even persons that use only offline tourism.

The profile of the respondents is given in Table 2. Information about demographic characteristics was correlated with percentage of online tourism products consumed in the last 3 years from total of tourism products consumed. For example those using 25-

50% online tourism products consume 50-75% offline tourism products. Characteristics presented in Table 2 shows that there are respondents from almost all categories (except those over 65 years) which assure an appropriate balance and more representativeness of the used sample.

Table 2: Respondents profile and share of using the online for tourism products

Characteristics	nonusers	< 25%	25 – 50 %	50– 75 %	> 75%
Age	17	19	39	160	111
	(4.91%)	(5.49%)	(11.27%)	(46.24%)	(32.09%)
<20 4.62%	2	4	1	7	2
20-35 57.81%	15	4	26	95	60
35-50 26.02%	-	10	8	30	42
50-65 10.69%	-	1	4	25	7
>65 0.86%	-	-	-	3	-
Gender	17	19	39	160	111
F 53.18%	7	12	26	88	51
M 46.82%	10	7	13	72	60
Education	17	19	39	160	111
Basic 7.8%	3	-	4	8	12
High school 32.66%	8	11	11	40	43
College 6.65%	2	1	2	8	10
University 44.79%	4	7	20	78	46
Post university 8.10%	-	-	2	26	-
Income	17	19	39	160	111
< 500 lei 21.39%	3	4	7	33	27
500-1500 lei 35.84%	5	14	10	54	41
1500-2500 lei 24.56%	7	1	14	38	25
>2500 lei 18.21%	2	-	8	35	18
Residence	17	19	39	160	111
Rural 18.50%	2	2	9	25	26
Urban 81.50%	15	17	30	135	85

Source: made by authors

As can be seen from the above table, the majority of the respondents (approximately 90%) use more online tourism products (between 50%-100%) than offline tourism products.

Regarding the classification data for the sample, online users are young, the majority between 20-50 years old (83% of the total), almost equal male and female (F 53.18% and M 46.82%), almost half (44.79%) of them having higher education studies (university graduates), most of them earning around Romanian average incomes and live mainly in urban areas.

4. CONCLUSIONS

After consulting the main sources of literature references the present study can be considered one of the first researches on online tourism in Romania. *The results offer managerial implications for business environment, travel destination areas, services, and facilities and also for tourism organizations.*

Using of the projective technique led to the shaping of the personality of the respondents. Romanian tourists are friendly, but can be flattery, pleasant, documented, informed, hoping for a better life, independent, involved in decisions they take, surprising. The study shows that the personality profile of respondents overlaps with the identified profile of online tourism. This explains the preference of respondents for online tourism products than for offline. Online tourism is perceived as lonely, but consumption is emotional, using involves vigilance, is associated with leisure, is rich in information, leads to a better standard of living, is a helpful tool and offers surprises. Offline tourism is used when you need help, do not involve risky decisions, but it requires attention, can represent equally a positive or negative version, is safety, more realistic, offers the chance to ask questions and receive answers in real time.

From the demographical point of view main online users of tourism products are young, with no gender differentiation, educated, with average incomes and live in urban areas. These identified profiles have many implications both for further scientific researches, but especially for all stakeholders involved in tourism activities. Limitations of the present study refer to representativeness of the sample, being a qualitative approach.

References

- Bonn, M.A., Furr, L.H. & Susskind, A.M. (1998). Using the Internet as a pleasure travel planning tool: An examination of the sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics among Internet users and nonusers. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 22 (3), pp. 303-317.
- Bringgs, S. (2001). *Successful Web Marketing for the Tourism and Leisure Sectors*, London: Kogan Page Limited
- Buhalis, D. & Law, R. (2008). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet-The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), pp. 609-623.
- Christou, E. & Kassianidis, P. (2002). Consumer's Perceptions and Adoption of Online Buying for Travel Products. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*. 12(4), pp. 93-107.
- Dixit, M., Belwal, R., Singh, G. (2006). *Online tourism and travel (analyzing trends from marketing perspective)*. Skyline Business School Journal, 3 (1). pp. 89-99.
- Hendricks, V. M., Blanken, P. and Adriaans, N. (1992). *Snowball Sampling: A Pilot Study on Cocaine Use*. Rotterdam: IVO.
- Kim, D., Lehto, X. & Morrison, A. (2007). Gender differences in online travel information search: Implications for marketing communications on the Internet. *Tourism Management*, 28(2), pp. 423-43.

- Mills, J. and Law, R. (2004). *Handbook of Consumer Behavior, Tourism, and the Internet*. New York: Harworth Hospitality Press.
- Peng, H., Xu, X., Chen, W. (2013). Tourist Behaviors in Online Booking: A New Research Agenda. *Communications in Information Science and Management Engineering*, June 2013, Vol. 3 Iss. 6, pp. 280-285.
- Sigala, M. (2011). Special Issue Web 2.0 in travel and tourism: Empowering and changing the role of travelers, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2)), pp. 607-608.
- Snijders, T. (1992). Estimation on the basis of snowball samples: how to weight, *Bulletin Methodologie Sociologique*, 36,), pp. 59-70.
- Tsiotsou, R. H., Goldsmith, R.E. editors (2012). *Strategic Marketing in Tourism Services*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012.
- Yoo, K.-H. & Gretzel, U. (2011). Influence of personality on travel-related consumer-generated media creation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), pp. 609-621.