

THE ROMANIAN CONSUMER PROFILES IN ONLINE BOOKING EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract: *Tourism is considered (WTTC) one of the top three industries as importance in the global economy of the 21st century. With the development of information technology and electronic commerce, the electronic (online) booking seems to be a popular way to facilitate access to certain goods and tourism services via the Internet.*

The literature clearly indicates that online booking vacations, transportation and other services related to tourism package developed and diversified nearly at the same degree with advances made in Information Technology and Communication (ITC).

However, "there are wide variations in online usage levels between different countries ... Australian's online usage is 44 % and Spain's online usage is 14% from all transactions" (online-booking from CWT).

Regarding the consumer profile using 'online booking ', the literature does not provide a generally accepted set of evaluation attributes.

In the world is talking today about "Generation Y", in other words about those who have reached maturity in the early millennium. Basically it's about consumers born between 1980 and 1995, hence with ages between 18 and 33 years.

In this context, in our exploratory research we conducted a statistical study on students, tomorrow's economic specialists with knowledge in ITC from minimal to advanced levels. The hypothesis of the study are: a. Humans with advanced computer skills using the Internet for booking holidays; b. Humans with low ITC skills choose the classical method of booking holidays by contacting a tour company.

The results of our survey showed that the choice of online tools for booking holidays becomes an increasingly used method in Romania but consumers still lack confidence in the online environment. This phenomenon often motivates the consumers to contact a tour company regardless of their ITC skills or travel experience. We also proved that there is no strong connection between people with good ITC knowledge and the employment of online booking as well as between the tourism experts and booking through tour companies.

Our study shows that: on-line booking for Y Generation is not an independent process, but is considered a stage of the process of making reservations for travel packages.

Keywords: online booking; travel website; holydays booking; tourism

JEL classification: L86; M15; M31

Introduction

Tourism is considered (WTTC, WTO, CWT) one of the top three industries as importance in the global economy of the 21st century. This fact is proved by the situation at world tourism economic sector in recent reports WTTC (WTTC). According to this study, the latest annual research from WTTC produced with our research partner, Oxford Economics, shows that 2013 was another successful year for the Travel & Tourism sector

off the back of an improving economy. The importance of this sector as a means of economic growth is argued by the study through a set of key findings:

- In 2013 it directly contributed to the world economy growth by 3.1%, bringing US\$2.2 trillion to world gross domestic product (GDP); it also generated 101 million jobs.
- Considering its broader impact, like on various related supply chains, Travel & Tourism contributed to a 3.0% growth within the global GDP, which is higher than the overall economic growth rate, for the third consecutive year. It also overcame global sectors like public services, financial and business services as well as manufacturing, retail and distribution.

The access to tourism services is increasingly facilitated by online booking software, leading to new customer behavior patterns when buying travel services. The development of the information technology and communication (ITC) and the e-commerce, online booking proves to be one of the most popular means of reserving travel services through the Internet.

The online booking software systems are highly utilized in travel related businesses like hospitality, airlines, rent-a-car and others. The online booking services are provided in conformity with specific legal constraints, which generally derive from laws that regulate Internet and e-commerce services, online contracts and payment the electronic signature and online marketing.

Online booking provide its followers with several advantages like: high availability of the service, automatic response for service requests, the ability of comparing different types of service or different service providers and others.

In this work we conducted a statistical study on students with knowledge in ITC from minimal to advanced levels. The hypotheses of the study are: a. Humans with advanced computer skills use online booking for reserving their holidays; b. Humans with low ITC skills choose the classical method of booking holidays by contacting a tour company.

The results of our survey showed that the choice of online tools for booking holidays becomes an increasingly used method in Romania but consumers still lack confidence in the online environment. This phenomena often motivates the consumers to contact a tour company regardless of their ITC skills or travel experience.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 1 we give the background of our work, in Section 2 we formulate the hypotheses of our study, in Section 3 we present the results of the conducted statistical study and finally conclude in Section 4.

1. Background

The literature (Rach et al,2003; Ansah et al,2012; Buhalis et al,2010) clearly indicates that online booking vacations, transportation and other services related to a tourism package developed and diversified nearly at the same degree with advances made in Information Technology and Communication. Nowadays we can find many software systems that allow online booking of tourism-related services, like portals, tour platforms, mobile applications and social networks that integrate online booking facilities.

The share of the potential tourists that use online booking is still relatively low, though increasing. In report from CWT online-booking “there are wide variations in online usage levels between different countries ... Australian’s online usage is 44 % and Spain’s online usage is 14% from all transactions”.

In Romania there is no accurate and publicly available centralized and structured information regarding the number of travel service packages sold through online booking per service providers (online revue turismmarket.com). The online booking in the Romanian tourism is still underdeveloped and confronts with various issues. However, for developing such systems with functionalities that answer specific needs implies

accurate knowledge regarding the potential customer's profiles. To the best of our knowledge, the literature and online revue does not provide a profiling of the Romanian potential customers in the tourism sector regarding the online bookings.

Regarding the online booking customer profiles there is no generally employed set of attributes to characterize the profile. In (legi-internet.ro) the authors divide for their study the potential customers of touristic services that use online booking in the following categories:

- Pupils and students, which very often use the information technology in general and represent a consistent share of the specific market;
- Customers with ages between 25 and 50 that use the information technology due to professional reasons;
- Customers with ages greater than 50 which exhibit a low employment of the information technology in general.

In the online revue turismmarket.com the authors use a segmentation of the customers in the tourism sector based on the age at which they gained access to and became familiar with the Internet. More exactly, they refer to a *generation Y*, containing individuals that reached maturity at the beginning of this millennium. Hence, these people were born between 1980 and 1995 and now have ages between 18 and 33. More, the individuals born in this millennium, also called *digital natives*, for which the Internet was always available do not constitute the subject of the present study.

In our approach, accessing online service booking in general regards two dimensions:

- Providing online booking services by organizations like governments and touristic companies and
- The capacity of accessing and using the services by the potential customers.

Within the first dimension there have been made significant progresses (revue online incomemagazine.ro) regarding the improvement of the online booking services. However, regarding the capacity of the customers to access and really use these services, the customers take individual actions to improve their skills of using ITC in general, not especially for making online bookings.

Starting from the described context, in this paper we test the hypothesis of a correlation between the ITC skills of customers that aim at accessing touristic services and the preference of using online bookings.

2. Hypotheses development

In this research we used the structured interview method (Shahzard,2010), more precisely a questionnaire tool. The questionnaire was used to identify the profile of the student that fits mostly the online system for reservation and planning of holidays in Romania.

In our study we achieve through three phases:

1. Exploratory study;
2. Empirical study;
3. Defining requirements / need.

The purpose of this statistical study was the challenge of comments, opinions, suggestions and idea developed in other studies by practitioners and theorists in the field of economic computer science. The study focused on collecting as many ideas and suggestions as possible from the experts participating in the study who were encouraged to express their ideas and opinions freely. At the end of this phase we developed a questionnaire to be completed in a brainstorming session. The ideas of the specialists participating in the meeting were concentrated in items of the questionnaire. In the phase of empirical study we applied the questionnaire.

Table 1: Materials and methods

Type of study	method	Number of participants	Type of who attend	Number of participants
Exploratory study	Brainstorming	4	IT specialists	3
			travel specialists	1
Validation of survey	Poll	107	students	107

The statistical processing of data was performed using SPSS software (version 16.0) and Excel.

The testing of the differences significance among the three groups of participants for a given variable was performed using non parametric tests, a decision determined by the criterion of normality of data variables distribution. Testing the normality of the distribution was made apriori by viewing the histograms of distribution, completed with the Shapiro - Wilks test. To estimate the reliability of the questionnaire, based on the data gathered, we used the following statistical analyzes:

- split-half method - calculating the reliability coefficient of the entire test, we obtained the value $r = 0.80$, and a confidence level $p < 0.04$;
- internal consistency analysis method based on which we calculated Cronbach α internal consistency coefficient, (0.79) which reveals the unitary structure of the employed instrument.

We affirm: the questionnaire should not be modified to test the hypothesis of the study. We remind the hypothesis of the study are:

- H_1 . Humans with advanced computer skills use online booking systems to reserve their holydays;
- H_2 . Humans with low ITC skills choose the classical method of booking holidays by calling a tour company.

3. Statistical study

The questionnaire was applied to 107 students of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, of which 28% men and the remaining of 72 % women. The subjects on whom we conducted the research, are distributed on age groups as follows:

1. 97.2% with ages between 21-30 years;
2. 0.9% with ages between 31-40 years;
3. 1.9% with ages between 41-50 years;

The participants in this study are:

1. 28% students of the Department of Economic Computer Science, thus we suppose that they have advanced IT knowledge and minimum knowledge of tourism; In this group, the subjects studied on average 3.9 years the use of computer, respectively 4.67 years computer programming.
2. 43.9% students of Department of Management, environmental economy so we assume that they have advanced knowledge of IT and minimum knowledge of tourism; In this group, the subjects studied on average 3.64 years the use of computer, respectively 0.51 years computer programming.
3. 28 % students of the Department of Tourism Economy, so we assume they have minimum IT knowledge and advanced knowledge in tourism; In this group, the subjects studied on average 3.5 years the use of computer, respectively 1.20 years computer programming.

The participants in the study say they have a rate of 99.1% knowledge of computer and only 16.8% were certified ECDL, of which 44.4% achieved a very good score, 44.4 % good score and the rest of 11.1% average score.

The participants in the study say that for booking holidays, 52.3% use travel websites, 16.8% travel agencies, 23.4 % other physical methods and 7.5 % other virtual methods. The study continued with the testing of an association between the training of the participants and the instruments chosen for booking holidays. For this purpose, we applied the Shapiro-Wilks test ($p=0.000$), thus rejecting the hypothesis that the data are normally distributed and we decide to apply the nonparametric test, Kurskal-Wallis test, according to which, in the study

1. There are no significant differences in the way the planning of holidays is made among the study groups ($\chi^2=3.800$, $p=0.150$). The behavior noticed is that IT specialists and the group of non-specialists in any area prefer electronic instruments for booking holidays, while tourism experts prefer the traditional method, more exactly, they call on a travel agency, but at the same time, they use virtual methods.
2. There are significant differences in the manner in which the assessment of knowledge about tourism web-sites browsing among the three study groups ($\chi^2=11.223$, $p=0.004$) is made. In this context, we applied the Mann-Whitney test ($U=197.67$, $p=0.04$) according to which there are differences between the group of IT experts and the group of specialists in tourism.
3. There are significant differences in the manner in which the assessment of knowledge about internet browsing among the 3 groups studied ($\chi^2=28.746$, $p=0.000$) is made. The specialists in computer science have the best knowledge in this field, followed by the specialists in tourism. The analysis continued with the application of the Mann-Whitney test, according to which we obtained significant differences between the group of computer specialists and the group of experts in tourism, namely ($U=189$, $p=0.000$).
4. There are significant differences regarding the most convenient method of booking holidays among the 3 groups studied ($\chi^2=9.223$, $p=0.04$). The specialists in computer science believe that the most convenient method of booking holidays is the websites, and the experts in tourism believe that both virtual and classical method are convenient. In this context, we applied the Mann-Whitney test ($U=197.67$, $p=0.04$), according to which there are differences between the group of IT experts and tourism experts.

The study shows that people with advanced knowledge of ITC use virtual instruments for booking holidays, but they also call on agencies. So, the hypothesis of the study is partially fulfilled, namely that people working in IT are tempted to use the internet to find the best deal for their holidays, but do not give up on specialists in the field, namely the travel agencies. The behavior of the specialists in tourism is that they prefer the combined method, more exactly they call on travel agencies, but at the same time, they use travel web-sites to book a holiday. Non-specialists in any field have no behavior to draw attention; they often identify with tourism experts and IT experts.

Conclusions

In this work we proposed a profiling of the Romanian customer that aims at accessing touristic services through online booking.

The conclusion of our survey reveals that the choice of online tools for booking holidays becomes a method increasingly used in Romania but still lack confidence in the online environment.

This lack of confidence will cause often call a tour company regardless of their IT knowledge and / or travel.

We cannot conclude strongly that people with good knowledge of IT use only the Internet and tourism experts use tourism companies, is a situation means that a minimum level of ITC skills will allow virtual instruments along with the services provided by Travel Company.

This work represents a start-point in the effort of better profiling the Romanian customers that use the online booking software systems in the tourism and travel sector.

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