ASPECTS REGARDING THE WAY IN WHICH GUESTHOUSES IN FELIX SPA AND 1 MAI SPA USE THE ONLINE TOOLS

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Abstract: *The beneficial effects of thermal water on health make the spa resorts an important attraction for tourists. They can relax or benefit from comprehensive recovery treatments, and also, they can make hiking in the surrounding areas. The spa tourism in the Felix Spa - 1 Mai Spa area is supported, besides hotels, by many guesthouses. Most of the tourists are searching for information online, using online services for booking or paying. Therefore, it is of great importance the way in which the guesthouses are signaling their presence online and the tools they use. In this paper, we present the results of the analysis made for several websites of different guesthouses in the Felix Spa - 1Mai Spa area. In analyzing web sites, we mainly considered online tools regarding customer loyalty. We also have tracked the extent to which each of the categories of instruments considered is used by the guesthouses.*

Keywords: *online presence; online tools; customer satisfaction and loyalty tools; digital marketing.*

JEL Classification: *C80; M21.*

1. Introduction

Spa tourism has an old tradition in our country. It generates positive social and economic effects, contributes to the economic development of the region in which it manifests.

The beneficial effect of the thermal waters in the FELIX Spa - 1MAI Spa area has been discovered since ancient times. The geo-thermal water springs have curative properties, being known abroad. FELIX Spa - 1 MAI Spa area, located in the north-west of the country, in the Crisuri plain, enjoys a continental climate with mild winters and summers having moderate temperatures, being ideal for spa tourism.

The conditions of relaxation, rest, and recovery attract a large number of Romanian and foreign tourists annually. Here, they can find:

- Modern treatment bases
- Thermal water pools
- A covered Aqua Park
- Lakes covered with water lilies
- Forest in the area, which offers the possibility of nature walks
- Leisure activities such as horse riding, fishing, paintball, running trails

- The opportunity of visiting the city of Oradea, located nearby. Tourists can use public transportation, which runs regularly and at short intervals.
- Option for participating in excursions organized in the Apuseni mountains area.

For accommodation, tourists can opt either for a hotel or one of the many guesthouses in the area. They can call a travel agency or they can make their own reservation.

According to Satyavani and Chalam, the Internet plays a significant role in consumer decision making. There are millions of people online every moment, and they are potential customers in the online market (Satyavani and Chalam, 2018).

According to Conyette, consumers search the web for information before making a purchase. The behavior mentioned above is typical to the travel sector, due to the high level of involvement in the travel product (Conyette, 2010).

Conyette and College say the Internet is widely used for booking or purchasing travel products. These activities can take place before the trip begins, but also during their journey (Conyette and College, 2012).

According to Conyette and College, more and more travel products will be booked online, since online intelligent agents are becoming more powerful and easier to use, and portable devices are becoming more and more versatile (Conyette and College, 2012).

According to Satyavani and Chalam, the Internet and web technologies have created a new environment that allows the online transmission of any information, using multimedia tools. The web is the environment that enables customers to decide everything with the click of a mouse. Online customer is generally stronger and more demanding (Satyavani and Chalam, 2018). Online tools help the customer in the decision-making process and contribute to the quality of the decisions taken (Haubl and Trifts, 2000). Maziriri and Chuchu state that there is a greater perceived risk associated to online buying rather than the traditional mode of shopping (Maziriri and Chuchu, 2017).

According to Bilgihan and Bujisic, customers who buy online make their purchase decision based on the information found on the websites (for example, customer reviews, camera images, virtual tours) (Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015).

Websites must be friendly and attractive while providing competent online communication that motivates clients (Satyavani and Chalam, 2018).

The number of people who are informed online about tourist destinations, who visit several websites before choosing their destination, who make online reservations or payments is increasing. Also, the online marketing tools have a tremendous contribution on how the marketing specialists approach their activities and on how they reach their marketing goals (Popa, Tarca, and Tarcza, 2016; Popa, 2015).

Following these trends, guesthouses are concerned about becoming as visible as possible online. Also, they tend to configure their websites to provide useful and easy to find information, to offer the possibility of online reservations and payments.

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2. The premises and research methodology

In order to evaluate the way in which the guesthouses in the Felix Spa and 1 Mai Spa use the online instruments for their activity, we analyzed the websites for 80 of the guesthouses. In this analysis we were focused on the online tools used to ensure customer loyalty. The research is exploratory in nature, based on content analysis as research method.

Bruhn (Bruhn, 2001; pp.111) stated that customers' devotion can be increased by enhancing its experience through an offer oriented toward its expectation and an increased performance of the company.

For a guesthouse to increase customer loyalty it can use multiple instruments, which can be classified in multiple ways. Different authors tried to group them in various ways. Thus, Bruhn created the following classification for these tools(Bruhn, 2001; pp.124-125):

- tools focused on interaction
- tools focused on satisfaction
- tools aiming to prevent customer migration.

We considered this classification suited in establishing the customer loyalty tools categories identified on the analyzed guesthouses websites.

We started from the following three hypotheses:

- Websites are friendly, information are easily accessible.
- The most of the online tools used to increase customer loyalty are part of the satisfaction-focused tools.
- The most used online customer loyalty tools are part of those related to interaction.

The following two issues were considered:

- How much the online customer loyalty tools are used on the analyzed websites
- How intensive each of the customer loyalty tools categories previously mentioned are used on the websites.

3. Data analysis and interpretation

We identified a number of 27 customer loyalty tools on 80 analyzed websites. The number of identified tools varies from a category to another as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of customer loyalty tools identified by tools categories

Category of customer loyalty tools	tools focused on interaction	tools focused on satisfaction	tools aiming to prevent customer migration
Number of tools identified	6	16	5

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The widest tool palette belongs to the tools focused on satisfaction. This indicates that the guesthouses in Felix Spa – 1 Mai Spa are strongly oriented toward their customers' satisfaction degree. When refering to hospitality business, guest satisfaction is strongly related to the decision weather or not to return to the same hotel and / or reccommanding it to other tourists (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010), criticising or evaluating it on specific online booking systems such as booking.com, tripadvisor.com, priceline.com or agoda.com.

The narrowest tool palette belongs to the category of instruments focused on barriers to customer migration. This indicates that guesthouses in Felix Spa – 1Mai Spa area do not pay enough importance to this kind of instruments which should increase the customer loyalty if used.

Analyzing the data acquired according to those three categories mentioned above, we found that:

- Few interaction-focused instruments are used, but as much as 25% of them can be found on all analyzed websites. In what concerns them we observed the following:
  - All websites provide with an e-mail address and one or more phone numbers (both on terestrial line and cellphones) for information or booking.
  - The most of the websites offer an online booking form. In many cases there is a delay for confirmation which sometimes can be longer.
  - Some of the guesthouses offers the possibility of online checking for the room availabilities for the desired period. This way the customer can check quickly room availabilities for the desired period and also he/she can decide on the way for booking the room (by phone, email, or online form). This way the waiting time for availability confirmation is avoided.
  - Some of the guesthouses offers the possibility of online booking, but using third online dedicated booking websites (such as, for example, booking.com)
  - Even if in small number, there are guesthouses which allow booking only by phone calls. If they would use online booking services, they might be more attractive for customers preferring the online interaction way in choosing their leisure location.
  - The most of the analyzed websites do not offer their clients the possibility of posting comments or customer reviews. However, some of the analyzed guesthouses can be found on dedicated booking websites (such as booking.com) which offer the possibility of posting such comments and to read other customer reviews.

  Figure 1 shows the interaction-focused instruments degree of use for the analyzed guesthouses.
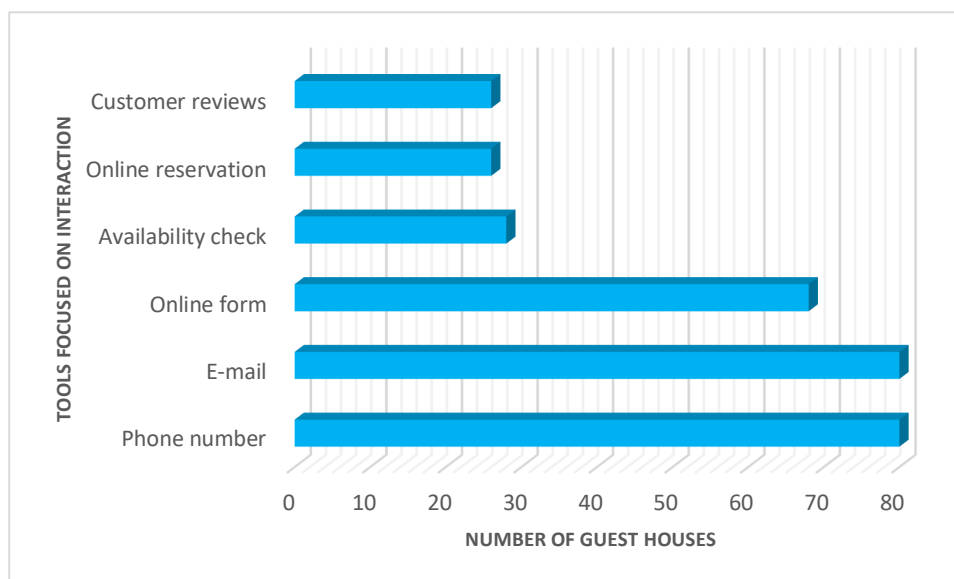
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Figure 1. The use of customer interaction-focused instruments for the analyzed guesthouses

- The guesthouses websites from the Felix-Spa – 1Mai-Spa area are conceived to offer a high degree of satisfaction to their customers. Thus:
  - All websites offer informations regarding the guesthouse location and images of the surroundings and rooms. To show their exact location, most of the guesthouses use interactive maps (such as google maps). Very few of them limit their location information to terrestrial address and/or GPS coordinates.
  - All websites provide information regarding the services they offer to the customers. Some of them offer a wide palette of services, while other have a narrow one. Among the most common services one can find jacuzzies, children playgrounds, gazeboos, courtyard with barbecue facilities, sitting area, fully equiped kitchen, freeparking at the property or guarded parking. Among the services offered to a lesser extent one can find thematic excursions (such as for hunting and fishing), trips in the neighborhoods and to Stana de Vale resort, Bears' Cave, hiking or biking or tours for visiting Oradea.
  - Among the serices provided „free wifi" can be seen, which demonstrates that guesthouses managers are aware of the increasing role of easy accessing to online communication services in attracting and maintaining their customers.

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- A large number of websites offer information related to tourism, culture and leisure activities in the area, and also about curative tourism.
- Some of the websites, even though a small number, offer performance warranties, in the form of diploms and certificated issued to them by different authorities. Also, some of the guesthouses show a list of collaborating partners.
- The least frequent instruments encountered are those related to complaints management.

In order to visualize the satisfaction-focused degree of use for the analyzed guesthouses, we grouped the 16 identified instruments in 11 groups (Figure 2). Mainly we grouped the services provided, using as the grouping criteria the frequency of their appearance on the websites.
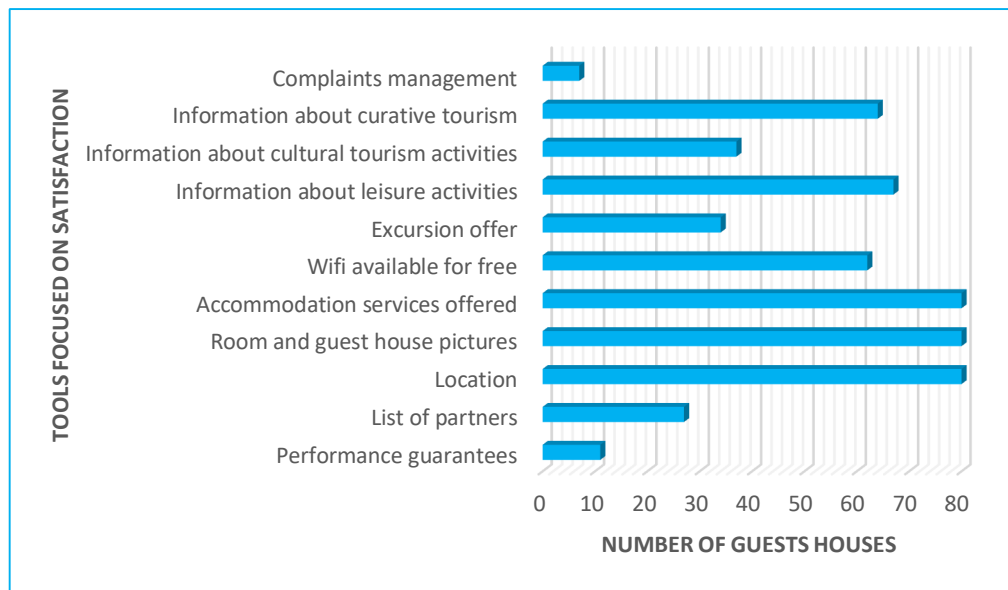

Figure 2: The use of customer satisfaction-focused instruments for the analyzed guesthouses

- Even though the tools aiming to prevent customer migration are used in small number, we encountered them on a relative large number of wbsites. Regarding to these instruments:
  - The most seen instruments were those related to fees and guesthouse reputation.
  - The least used instrument was the one referring to bonuses (free/welcome drinking, fruit basket, etc.)

- A relative large number of analyzed guesthouses offer vouchers/discounts for access to water-parks or to Apollo-Felix geothermal water strand.

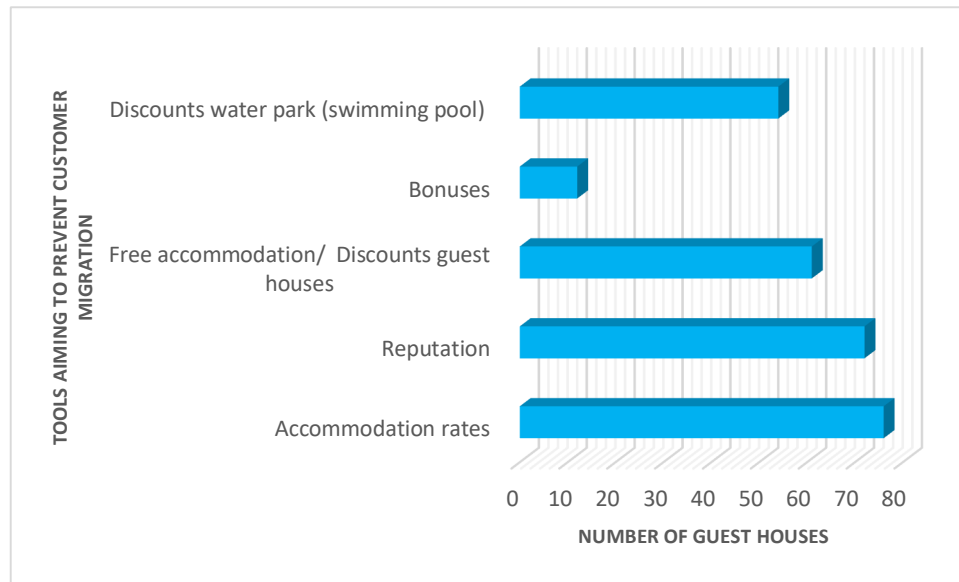Figure 3 shows the degree of use for the tools aiming to prevent customer migration

Figure 3: The use of tools aiming to prevent customer migration

4. Conclusions

The study results show that most of the analyzed websites are friendly, the relevant information is easily and quickly accessed. Therefore, managers understood that only online presence is not enough and a potential customer leaves the website if their expectations are not fulfilled.

All the analyzed websites use online instruments (on a larger or smaller scale) to attract and make their customers stable. Some of the guesthouses give great importance to the use of these instruments, thus being able to create themselves advantages with respect to other guesthouses having similar accommodation conditions.

The most identified instruments (as number) are those targeting customers satisfaction. Meanwhile, we found on all websites both instruments targeting satisfaction and instruments targeting interaction. Instruments which are part of the category of tools aiming to prevent customer migration are rarely seen on the websites, even though a small number of them can be found on a large number of websites. Guesthouses pay the biggest attention to their customers' satisfaction, followed by the way in which they interact with them. They do not pay enough

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importance to the tools aiming to prevent customer migration, which would allow them to increase their rate of customer fidelity.

Guesthouses showing on their websites a larger palette of the online tools have better chances in the process of attracting and keeping their customers.

Some of the guesthouses, not too many, are listed on the online booking systems (such as booking.com). This means that their managers understand that an active presence online means an increasing number of their customers.

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