DIGITAL PROMOTION FOR HOTELS OF BĂILE FELIX- VÂRTOP RESORTS. CONTENT QUALITY ANALYSIS

Miruna Diana MOZA

PhD Field: Business Administration, Doctoral School of Economics, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
moza.miruna@gmail.com

Abstract: *Nowadays, digital promotion is a new "means" of communication between companies and the potential customer. One of the basic tools as regards the online promotion in the tourism industry, respectively the hotel industry is the website. This is a complex business card, conveyed by technology, a digital sample provided to the customer, a first impression that may bring less or more value. The website aims to direct all efforts in making known the package/service offered, to provide potential customers with all the necessary information, to determine potential customers to visit and also to act. Thus, this paper aims to analyze how hotels in two tourist resorts situated in Bihor county, namely Băile Felix and Vârtop Arieșeni, are promoted via the website. The paper proposes a specific grid for websites analysis, based on observation, using the Fisher-Rosenberg pattern as a method of scaling and drawing a series of conclusions, of trends and main shortcomings and possibilities for improvement.*

Keywords: *digital promotion; website; hotel industry*

JEL Classification: M31; M37; Z33; L83

1.Introduction

The emergence of the Internet has led to the change of some essential elements in the field of promotion. However, the phenomena that led to this change may be rendered into two words, namely: digitalization and connectivity. The first of these two, digitalization, aims to change information, texts, images and sounds into a so-called bitstream that can be sent in real time from one corner of the world to any other place and connectivity refers to the creation of computer networks.
The hospitality and tourism industry has been one of the so-called major beneficiaries of this change, both in terms of services provided, new types of businesses adopted and the method used to communicate with customers. (Tajeddini, Ratten, Merkle, 2020) The Internet has become over time one of the most used means of communication in the tourism sector, being the optimal channel for creating the connection between the tourism economic operator and the potential customer. Thus, there has been a swift change in the way customers have begun to interact with businesses in this field, especially in terms of information relevance and time efficiency. (Ferreira, Ratten, Dana, 2017)
In this context, the digital promotion was also integrated, the promotion process also crossing the boundaries of digitalization. According to N. Lupu, most customers use these digital channels "to buy holidays, to book tickets for various means of transportation, hotel rooms or any other tourist services", the internet becoming today, one of the most important sources of tourist information. (Lupu,

2010). In response to these activities and due to the mobility that characterizes the tourism industry, namely the fact that unlike other industries, it is the only one in which supply can not move towards the demand, digital promotion has gained more and more ground.

The internet continued thereby to have a significant influence on tourism and travels. H. Kim, Z. Xiang & R. Fesenmaier analyzed a series of data taken from the Pew Research Center, according to which, in 2010, 73% of US Internet users were searching online for information about travel. (Kim, Xiang, Fesenmaier, 2015). Another similar study and its results are presented by Eurostat. According to this study, in 2014, 4 out of 10 Europeans searched online for travel information, being deemed a major communication channel for the tourism sector. (Eurostat, 2015). Thus, in order to meet them and to be able to provide all the necessary information in order to attract customers, digital promotion was indeed necessary. Now, more than ever, in this pandemic context which has been a turning point for tourism, digital promotion plays a crucial role.

Having as main motivations: presence in the virtual space, dissemination of information, customer service, increasing public interest, access to various important target markets (Saviciuc, 2016), digital promotion is an essential pillar of the existence of a tourism business today. R.O. Yusuf stated that there existed a close relationship between the consumer's decision to buy and the information transmitted via the relevant websites with quality content. (Yusuf, 2009). Hence, this article mainly analyzes the websites, as they represent a more complex business card through technology, a digital sample given to the potential customer, a signature, a first impression that may bring less or more value depending on the quality and the experience provided.

Following an analysis performed in 2014, on all existing hotels in the List of tourist facilities with classified accommodation function, according to Cojocea Maria-Luminiţa, promotion in the tourism industry is an issue that needs to be improved, the online promotion being the solution necessary to save tourism. Following this analysis, the conclusions were that "most hotels do not know how to promote themselves, often, in fact aggravating their situation by promotion." (Luminiţa, 2014)

Starting from the above and the increasing importance of business digitalization in this field, this paper aims to supplement and implicitly continue the work previously presented, analyzing promotion means in the digital environment, respectively the websites of the hotels within two tourist resorts in Romania, Bihor County, namely: Băile Felix and Vârtop Arieșeni both in terms of quantity and quality. This research comes as an update of the previous one, having the purpose of marking the evolution during the 7 years and at the same time having as starting point a series of hypotheses established on the basis of the mentioned research.

2.The research purpose and methodology (content analysis of the pension websites in Felix and Vârtop Arieșeni)

The decisional topic of this paper arises from the need of a thorough and in-depth approach to the analysis of digital promotion in Romanian tourism, respectively hotels, especially those situated in two areas near Oradea, one of the most developed Romanian cities, which has recently become a tourist city and enjoys

the admiration of both national and international tourists. Thus, in order to perform this analysis, two tourist areas were chosen, namely the area of the Apuseni Mountains and Băile Felix area. Following the analysis of the interregional study on rural tourism development and employment boosting in Bihor and Covasna counties (O.T.P Consulting, 2015) it was noted that tourism in Bihor county is concentrated within two geographical poles, namely Apuseni Mountains and Băile Felix. Starting from this, Băile Felix and Vârtop (Arieșeni) were chosen as resorts of interest for the analysis. Although the second listed resort is located on the border between Bihor county and Alba county, Bihor county has no other resorts in this area (of the Apuseni mountains) that may be analyzed (e.g. Stâna de Vale- one hotel), thus opting for the analysis of the mountain resort Vârtop (Arieșeni).

Baile Felix is the largest spa in Romania, enjoying a special position in the west of the country, the main attractions being the thermal waters, wellness centers, hotels and treatment centers (Strutz, 2020). As regards the accommodation capacity, the resort has numerous accommodation facilities, namely 16 hotels, pensions and villas, cumulating a total of over 7,000 accommodation places, respectively 11,000 according to other sources. (Ban, Droj, 2019).

Vârtop-Arieșeni is an area also situated in western Romania, on the boundaries of Alba and Bihor counties, being a mountain area characterized by karst regions, an element that offers a high potential in terms of tourism. A mountain area with attractive landscapes and known for winter sports, hikes and tourist attractions unique in the country, the resort has a tourist potential which, according to studies is insufficiently exploited. (Dudaș, 2009).

The purpose of this research is to create an overview on the way the hotels of the two resorts are promoted in the digital environment and simultaneously identify remedial solutions. The hotel network in Bihor county.

Starting from the conclusions of the paper "Online promotion of hotels in Romania: Compromise between deficiencies and advantages?" published in 2014 by Luminița Cojocea, according to which all tourism promotion campaigns are inefficient as at the micro level, "respectively at the level of the accommodation establishment, the situation is inapproprate to promotion" (Cojocea, 2014) the research objectives were:

identification of of the hotel establishment in the digital environment (especially of its own website) and of a general data set

development of the analysis grid

analysis of the website complexity and evaluation of the items set in the grid (using the Fishbein-Rosenberg scaling method)

determining the general score for each hotel establishment

finding the most common deficiencies and their relevance

development of a general set of conclusions and recommendations

Having as reference work the one mentioned above and at the same time, a series of data and statistical analyzes used, the following hypotheses were set:

H1: Incidence of unpleasant situations is found among two and three-star hotels

H2: The description of the hotel is blended into the description of the resort/area where the hotel is situated

H3: Promotion is inappropriately performed, is of medium and low quality (50 points-30 points)

The research method used to obtain the necessary data was observation. This research method, although time consuming, aims to record patterns or people,

objects or events, in a systematic manner, the purpose being to obtain information of interest, (Naresh, 2004). In this case, the purpose was to register patterns in order to identify the ways of digital promotion used by hotel establishments. Moreover, it was decided to use a structured observation, in which plans for the data selection and registration are explicitly used. Thus, for the purposes of observation, an observation grid was set, respectively a plan provided with all the factors to be analyzed and subsequently evaluated. The research used disguised observation, this being simultaneously an assisted one, because the observation was made electronically, using the computer and the Internet.

An evaluation grid has been established for carrying out the research. 20 items were included in this evaluation grid. Each item has been assigned an importance on a scale of 0 to 10 as follows, depending on their importance to the customer:

Table 1: Evaluated items and their importance

Item	Importance
Errors or non-existent web domains	10
Organization's slogan identified on the site	2
Administrative information	3
Room and service presentation	10
Presentation of rates	10
Existence of images	10
Online booking	8
Online payment	8
Existence of contact information	10
Existence of the map and location of the hotel	8
Connection - Customer account	5
Newsletter subscription	4
External link to social networks	9
Existence of a search button	5
Bilingual site (available in several languages Ro/En)	10
Site adapted to the mobile phone	10
Text-graphics percentage (30% -70%)	8
Attractive design	8
Existence of the testimonial section	8
Using the natural environment as a promotional element	7

Source: Created by author

Each item has been subsequently evaluated, on a scale from 0 to 10 as 0 represents a degree of non-fulfillment of the item, 5 represents a partial degree of fulfillment and 10 an integral degree of fulfillment. In order to establish these scales and the general score for each hotel establishment, the Fishbein-Rosenberg scaling method was used. This method of scaling allows the evaluation of the stimuli that have been analyzed considering the importance assigned to each criterion and the degree of fulfillment. Being also referred to as the scale with a constant sum distributed as a percentage among the research variables or on all

stages of the scale, this is the most efficient general solution of the report scale."
(Săvoiu, 2004).
Thus, a number of 12 hotels of the two previously mentioned resorts were analyzed. The sampling was of the census-type. In order to conduct the research, a list of hotel establishment has been drawn up based on the on-site visits and the information available on the Booking.com website. The initial sample included all the hotels in the two resorts, but from this point of view the research was limited, namely the lack of their own websites about many establishments or their group (the case of SC Turism Felix SA), thus, the analysis included hotels that have their own website. We analyzed 8 hotels in Băile Felix and the 5 websites that belong to S.C Turism Felix S.A. and 3 hotels in Vârtop-Arieșeni, these are the only ones that have their own website.

3. Research results. Most commonly deficiencies found

After analyzing the 12 hotels and drawing up an overall score based on the evaluation grid created and the method of scaling use (Fishbein Rosenberg), it turned out that 83.33% of hotels scored above average, which suggests a relatively high interest of hotels regarding to promotion via their own website. As for the hotels in Băile Felix, 77.77% of the establishments reached scores above average and in Vârtop resort, out of a total of 3 hotel establishments, all reached an average score. The scores obtained were higher in terms of hotels in Băile Felix, compared to hotels in Vârtop resort.
Only one of the websites analyzed presented errors, being temporarily closed and the following message was displayed on the site's page: "We will be back soon", thus, out of a total of 12 hotels, we subsbequently focused on 11 of them. The second criterion analyzed, namely the existence of a slogan, was of little importance, due to the low attention that the client pays to them. Out of the total of 7 hotel establishments, they posted their slogan on the site, these being simple slogans such as "Thank you, our pleasure!" –Hotel Hyperion - Băile Felix or "Relaxing at the foot of the mountain" - Hotel Zâna Văii Arieșeni. However, a series of errors were also identified, being noticed a slogan such as: "Special services. Rooms from eur 60/night". Thus, it was found that both potential customers and hotel owners attach little importance to this fact.
The hotel description presents administrative data regarding the number of available rooms, buildings, etc., all hotels falling within a standard pattern of description. Another "key" element unanimously accepted and found in the presentation of hotels was the presentation of the rooms, with the exception of one of them. A similar importance, i.e. 10 points, was attached to the presentation of rates. In this context, a percentage of 66.66% of the analyzed sites posts their rates. A common deficiency was the presentation of the prices of the promotional packages on the occasion of the Easter or Christmas holidays, the standard prices for extra-season periods not being indicated.
The third element of major importance is deemed to be the existence of images. Their importance is known and understood by all hotels. Regardless of the quality of the images, all the analyzed hotels have a photo gallery section, respectively images.
Online booking, another element of high importance being conferred 8 points, is a shortcoming for hotels in the two areas. Less than 50% of them (41.66%) have this

tool, for the rest of the hotels, the booking being made either through other sites such as Booking.com or by phone. Simultaneously with the analysis of online bookings, the analysis of the possibility to pay online was also performed. Likewise, in this area, the analyzed hotels have deficiencies, so only 1 of the 5 hotels that have the possibility to book online, also ensures the possibility to make payment by card, which is currently a major deficiency.

The importance of contact information, a set of vital information, is understood by hoteliers, this aspect being checked by all hotels, including the one whose site is temporarily closed. The map, another tool that comes to meet the customer's needs, facilitating an additional activity to be carried out by that individual, is a strong point of 75% of the hotels under analysis.

Another analyzed aspect, with a relatively low importance, represented the client account, this being set up for the purpose of customer loyalty-enhacing, respectively keeping. Only one of the analyzed hotels has such a possibility, the interaction with the "house customers" being this way much easier. The possibility of subscribing to the newsletter also fell into the same category, with a similar purpose. However, this possibility is ensured by the only hotel mentioned above, namely Hotel Lotus Therm Băile Felix, the hotel that recorded the highest score in the evaluation grid.

External links to social networks, although they represent today a "must-have", we may assert that they still constitute a deficiency. 75% of the hotel sites grant this possibility, but even in these cases the links are not visible or represent only the addresses that need to be accessed, without incorporating a hyperlink. Their purpose is to meet the potential customer and familiarize it with the whole story and, respectively, to put it in touch with all the ways to promote the hotel. Furthermore, about the aim to meet the customer's needs is the following aspect analyzed, namely the existence of the search button, the search bar, which, although has a relatively low importance, gives the site a note of efficiency. However, a small percentage of hotels use this tool (33.33%).

One of the most important aspects was the availability of the site in several languages. We deemed this aspect to be an essential one related to the position of Bihor county, close to the borders and the need to make available these resorts to international tourists. Although a "must-have" of the times we live in, hotels are slow to provide sites that may be accessed in several languages. However, 41.66% ensure this opportunity, but all hotels are situated in Băile Felix, a fact that may be explained by the actual experiences with foreign customers and the number of foreign customers who step on the threshold of hotels. One thing is for sure, the offer should be available in a language of international circulation to provide a chance to know and a possibility to train the demand. In addition to the availability of the site in several languages, adapting the site to the phone screen is another very important element. With a higher rate than in the case of the previous tool, the hotels adapted the site for the mobile phone in a proportion of 83.33%.

The way the relationship between graphics and text is distributed is another element with defining effects on a potential customer's interaction with the website. Starting from a generally accepted ratio of 30% text, 70% graphics, this is respected in the proportion of 83.33%. This report has obvious influences on the design, so at the same time the degree of attractiveness of the design was analyzed. In this context, a series of negative aspects were reported, among which we may list: the chromatics used (black and white site), the quality of the uploaded

images, the website organization, the arrangement on the page. This aspect includes a multitude of sub-aspects that need to be closely analyzed, but, following the analysis, there is an attractiveness of the design among 58.33% of the sites.

The possibility to write testimonials or to read the testimonials written by other customers, although it is a useful tool, is provided only by 58.33% of the sites, for the rest, this element being on the list of possibilities for improvement.

The last element was the inclusion of the natural environment in the hotel promotion. However, it was found that both the thermal waters and the mountain area are present in the promotion of the hotel establishment, both through complex descriptions of the benefits of thermal waters and by presenting the existing mountain natural environment in the area in proportion of 75%, being also hotels whch promote themselves only by the services provided. Moreover, it is important to note that in the description of the hotel, they do not describe the area, but indirectly integrate the elements into the content.

Therefore, we may note that hotel websites, as a promotional tool, include the basic elements targeted: contact information (100%), the existence of images (91.66%), room presentation (83.33%), the site adaptation to mobile phone (83.33%). However, there are shortcomings in the presentation of rates, which is also essential for customer information (66.66%) and the availability of the site in several languages (41.66%). In other words, hotel websites meet the minimum, basic requirements, representing a good way to display a set of information, without creating a connection with the customer or without offering an experience.

The hotel that should be taken as a good practice example is the Lotus Therm Băile Felix Hotel, which meets the criteria mentioned above and strives to customize the interaction with the potential customer.

At the same time, a relatively low score is reached by the three-star hotels, the highest score going to the five-star hotel. An exception to the rule is Cristalin Hotel in Vârtop, which, although meets the conditions of a five-star hotel, its score is at the lower limit of the top.

Other aspects noted after the analysis will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Lotus Therm Hotel Băile Felix is an example of digital promotion via the website

President Hotel Băile Felix has as web domain www.baile-felix.ro, thus, in a search of the type: Băile Felix on Google search engine, President Hotel is indicated among the first results, the same hotel ensures a virtual hotel tour and also a map to identify the facilities/buildings, which is a strong point of the site.

Hyperion Hotel Băile Felix presents, in addition to the basic tools analyzed, a series of additional tools such as: exchange rate, temperatures in the resort, the website is based on a blog that takes the form of a website.

Zâna Văii Hotel of Vârtop Arieșeni provides a Live section that broadcasts live images on the slope.

In other words, the most common deficiencies are represented by the possibility of booking directly on the site, respectively making payments, which makes it difficult to meet the customer's needs and reflects a lack of digitization in the analyzed areas. Likewise, in terms of the degree of digitalization and the tendency to offer the customer an experience and interact with it, we may mention as a deficiency and lack of the possibility to create a customer account, to subscribe to the newsletter or to write a testimonial. Moreover, the availability of the site in several

languages is a lethal aspect that is overlooked by many hotels, so the foreign tourists' interaction with the site is limited or even rendered impossible.

4.Conclusions

Therefore, a trend of improvement may be noticed in terms of promotion via the hotels' websites. 7 years after the study "Online promotion of hotels in Romania: Compromise between deficiencies and advantages?" - L. Cojocea, the online promotion of hotels is no longer an issue that needs to be urgently improved, falling within the basic limits of the importance of having its own site and promotion. Thus H1: the incidence of unpleasant situations is found among 2 and 3-star hotels is a confirmed hypothesis. Average of 5-star hotels is 73.85p, average of 4-star hotels is 75.61 and the average of 3-star hotels is 55.22.

Table 2: Score reached following the analysis

Position	Hotel	Stars	Score
1	Lotus Therm Hotel	5	92,15
2	President Hotel	4	84,31
3	Hyperion Hotel	3	77,83
4	SC Turism Felix SA	4;3;3;3;2	77,12
5	Zana Vaii Hotel	3	73,2
6	Monaco Hotel	3	72,54
7	Aventus Hotel	4	67,32
8	Four Season Hotel	3	64,7
9	Nicoleta Hotel	3	59,47
10	Cristalin Hotel	5	55,55
11	Ami Hotel	3	35,29
12	Hotel Vital	3	6,53

Source: Created by author

The second hypothesis - H2: the description of the hotel is blended into the description of the resort/area in which the hotel is situated, it is refuted, the description of the hotels being made by presenting a set of administrative information. However, the resort description and benefits are mentioned by the sites.

The third hypothesis - H3: the promotion is inadequately carried out, medium and low quality (50 points - 30 points), it is refuted, in the analyzed areas Băile Felix and Vârtop Arieșeni, the quality reaching an average-higher level, the average score recorded by the hotels under analysis being 63.83.

The tourism may be saved by an on online promotion, but we deal with major shortcomings in the promotion of tourist areas and hotels abroad, this being also caused by the availability of sites in an international language. In this way, the possibility for foreign tourists to interact with the site is limited or prevented. As deficiencies generally encountered and at the same time aspects that need to be improved, we list the following: the possibility of booking directly from the site, respectively making payments, which complicates the process of meeting the

customer's need and reflects a lack of digitization in the analyzed areas, lack of a testimonials section.

This research had as a starting point a focus group in order to establish the importance of each element of the analysis, but it is deemed to improve the study and conduct a survey among potential customers in order to set concrete and well-founded evaluation criteria, improve the grid and the importance of each element of that grid. Another limit of the research is the fact that the website is a validation, a confirmation of the information collected by other promotion methods, presenting thus the products and services provided. In other words, the website represents the interface, the fundamental link between demand and supply rather than the primary element, by which the potential customer discovers a certain location, a certain hotel.

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