

The Quality of Online Marketing in the Field of Tourism Services in Albania



Tourism

Keywords: online marketing, tourism enterprises, websites, internet, Albania.

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Abstract

Online marketing is considered as one of the most effective ways for the tourism enterprises, particularly in terms of promotion of their services, the communication with markets, and the electronic commerce, as an added value of online marketing. In Albania, the internet services have relatively low prices. Due to this reason, the Internet access does not cost too much not only for the tourism enterprises, but also for the ordinary people, who in most cases use the latest mobile devices such as smartphones, Ipads, notebooks etc. This study aims to explore the quality of the Enterprise websites tourism, in terms of their menu, graphic quality, the number of options, electronic commerce etc. The sample of the study was N=200 participants, representatives of the respective tourism enterprises. The study was conducted in five touristic areas in Albania: Tirana, Durres, Shkodra, Vlora and Saranda. The research results showed that although a big part of the enterprises have invested in designing their websites, the other part of them do not have this. Also, the website allows a better communication with the costumers, but the possibility of online payments within the websites pages is limited.

1. Introduction

Albania has a very strategic geographical position in the region which makes it easily accessible from European markets. It is important to note that, in order to be attractive to customers, tourism services should be innovative and creative using particularly human and technological potential.

1.1 Internet users in Albania

During the last years, the number of internet users in Albania is growing. According to AKEP (2015), the number of subscribers with broadband access from fixed networks by the end of 2014, was about 207,000, compared to 183,000 in 2013, representing an annual increase of 13.3 %. All the main operators of fixed communications in the market have increased the number of subscribers for the year 2014.

1.2 The internet use as a marketing tool

The most compelling reason why companies need to have an active internet marketing strategy, is due to the transformation that has occurred in the manner how the customer search for information. While customers still visit the shops, talk with sales representatives, see along the shopping malls and speak with friends, a growing number of customers always consider the internet as the main source of getting the information.

The main focus of the electronic business processes (e-Business) in the tourism industry is the provision of services and activities, mainly through electronic marketing and sales. Online bookings and services are widely accepted by customers and travelers for business purposes.

Similarly, online purchases represent an incredibly useful form of transaction in the tourism industry. On the other hand, studies have shown that the automation of internal business processes has been less important for a sector such as the tourism services, than the various manufacturing industries. As a result, the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT), such as systems of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) was significantly lower than in other sectors of the economy.

1.3 The main aim of the study

The main aim of this study is to explore the quality of the Enterprise websites tourism, in terms of their menu, graphic quality, the number of options, electronic commerce and what is the relation between web page and performance?

1.4 Research questions and Hypothesis

- 1- Do the web - sites of tourism enterprises in Albania have the proper quality?
- 2- Is the electronic commerce used by the tourism enterprises websites as a very demanded service particularly from the international markets?

1.4.1 Hypothesis

H₁: The quality of enterprises's website will lead to an increased performance.

2. Literature Review

The tourism service providers have used the Internet for communicating, distributing and trading their products to potential customers around the world in an efficient way in terms of time and respective costs. In fact, the websites of the tourism companies have become the most important platform for e-commerce, followed by electronics markets, which are separate pages on the internet where companies can receive and provide information, be engaged in transactions, or cooperate in some way, such as the well known site of online transactions e-bay (e-Business W@tch, 2004).

So far, there has not been lot of data or studies on the quality of tourism enterprise's websites in Albania. But, in one of the few studies written by Traeger (2010), on IT Needs Assessment of the Tourism Sector in Albania, resulted that 67% of companies interviewed had a presence on the Internet by presenting mainly the name of the company and it's offers on the homepage. Bookings online was limited especially for bars and restaurants and travel agencies. Only 28% of respondents said that through their web sites can be realized automatic bookings. Understandably, companies generally do not have an adequate presence on the Internet to promote their activities, and also to put the various services for businesses and consumers. Also, other options such as online reservations through the websites of the companies are very limited (only 28%), which constitutes a major disadvantage for the enterprises. Today the international markets are seeking widely this service.

The Internet is an ideal way to communicate prices, special offers and availability status of the products/services of a tourism business. A very important component of the marketing mix, such as promotion, is easily transformable as a result of using the online promotion. The Internet provides also an effective tool for dissemination information in terms of labor and costs, almost simultaneously, for millions of consumers at the international markets. Online promotion combines the mass media with reality. It is used today in order to generate visibility, brand awareness, publicity, public relations, direct sales, technical assistance etc.

Studies on websites that are focused on electronic retail trade, have shown that during all the purchase phases, consumers have specific needs such as: (looking for information, communication, transactions) and want to use various electronic services, which are offered by the website of the company. Availability and quality of

these e-services (so-called e-CRM website features) affects customer satisfaction with the website and service (Khalifa and Liu, 2003).

3. Methodology

In this study is used the quantitative methods approach through the use of surveys to collect data . The study was conducted in five districts of Albania, particularly in Tirana, Vlora, Durres, Shkodra and Saranda. Although tourism services and related enterprises are not limited to these five districts, according to database for tourism and it's development, these areas have greater development of tourism industry during last years.

In this study, was included one of the most common models of non probability sampling called quota sampling. Data analysis was realized through the statistical software SPSS 16. To participate in the study, participants must be over the age of 18 and had the primary responsibility to manage a tourism enterprise (accommodation unit, travel agency and restaurant). They could be self owners or key managers. In order to realize the study as a research tool was used a questionnaire. At the end of data collection, the final number of questionnaires was $n = 200$. The method of data collection for this study was that of a face -to-face interview.

4. Results

Having a website does not always means that it's quality is high. However, in this study the enterprises that had a website had invested to it, at satisfactory levels. Specifically, 94.6% of the cases had the opportunity of contacting with the enterprise through the option "contact us", 87.5% of enterprise's websites provide options to find detailed information about services/ tourism products that they provide, in 70.8% of companies the clients had the possibility to customize/modify tourism services or product according to their specific needs, at 68.5% clients can perform online bookings, something that is in contradiction with the very low level of online payments, which is only 37.5%. About 65.5% of businesses had the opportunity to connect with other websites through links which provide useful information about tourism. 63.7% had search engines within the site for finding specific information quickly through keywords and 61.3% had the possibility to find helpful tourist information on the website as such: Info about the destination, information on visas, airlines, weather forecasts, local events, etc. The presence of multimedia elements on the website, such as: presentation of products/services with mobile images, 3D, video clips, commercials etc, was relatively at satisfactory levels with 59.5%. Also, the information on site's safety, for example, for online transactions, for privacy and rules that the enterprise applies for the safety and reliability of services offered 53.6%, and the possibility for looking for services/products based on pre-selected criteria such as: according to the price, duration of visit, week, day, number of persons etc was 47%.

In an effort to find a causal relation between the options of the website and performance through the use of ICT, the results showed that the best model is one that contains as predictor the option of providing the possibility to find detailed information about the services/tourism products, the online reservation, the ability to search for a service/product based on pre- selected criteria such as: by price, duration of visit, week, day, number of persons etc. Specifically, $R^2 = .230$, $F(1, 11) = 4.71$, $p < .001$. In the table 1 can be seen the beta coefficients respectively for the predictors. Thus the hypothesis 1 (H1: The quality of the enterprise site will lead to an increase in its performance) is partly suggested, for the elements of the websites which are involved in this model.

Table 1. The model between the website elements and the enterprises' performance based on ICT.
Coefficient ^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	-1.340	.309		-4.332	.000	-1.953	-.727
Our website offers the opportunity to find detailed information about services / tourism products that we offer	1.488	.326	.398	4.569	.000	.842	2.133
2 (Constant)	-1.390	.304		-4.566	.000	-1.993	-.786
Our website offers the opportunity to find detailed information about services / tourism products that we offer	1.111	.359	.297	3.094	.003	.400	1.823
Online reservations	.543	.236	.221	2.299	.023	.075	1.011
3 (Constant)	-1.365	.300		-4.556	.000	-1.958	-.771
Our website offers the opportunity to find detailed information about services / tourism products that we offer	1.196	.355	.320	3.366	.001	.492	1.900
Online reservations	.714	.245	.290	2.910	.004	.228	1.200
The possibility to search for a service / product based on pre-selected criteria such as : According to the price , duration of visit, week, day, number of persons etc .	-.444	.204	-.200	-2.171	.032	-.849	-.039
a. The dependent variable : Performance through ICT							

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Very important is the fact that most businesses also use the computer for carrying out their activities and the use of internet is at very high levels, reaching 94.2% of all the surveyed enterprises.

With regard to the tourism enterprise's websites, it was concluded that a large part has a special page on the Internet, but there is still a percentage of those who did not invest in this field.

The study concluded that there is a growing number of customers who visit websites for tourism travel, and it has helped the enterprises to have better communication with international clients, to have less cost in making the marketing campaigns compared with traditional methods form making them. Noteworthy is the fact that although a large proportion (68.5%) of the enterprises, had the opportunity to perform reservations through the websites, the possibility of online payments remaining at low levels with only 37.5%.

5.1 Recommendations

- Increasing the number of the enterprises which should include the possibility to make payments online through websites, in collaboration with the bank institutions.

- The entrepreneurs should take decisions regarding the modernization of their websites adding more options and innovative attractive graphic designs.

- Some medium enterprises should have a person in their staff who has to deal specifically with the website updates and communication services.

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