

eTourism: A comparison of online and offline booking methods and the importance of hotel attributes

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Abstract. *This paper investigates the impact of demographic and travel characteristics of hotel guests on online and offline reservations. It also examines the importance of hotel attributes in selecting a hotel and the differences in priorities between guests, who book their accommodation online and offline.*

Data was collected by surveys of visitors in three hotels in Dubrovnik.

The results of the study showed that the method of booking mostly depends on the nature of travel, and that the importance of hotel attributes is equal for all guests.

Keywords. Internet, online reservation, hotel selection factors, tourism

1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important industries in the world, having an important economic impact both on the macro and the micro level. Information is a crucial factor in the planning, booking and during the travel, and sometimes even after that. The nature of tourism and its products makes business tourism intensive from the information point [32]. Because of this, tourism is one of the industries on which the rapid changes in technology over the last twenty years have had the greatest impact. The important role of information in tourism draws with itself the important role of applying information technology in tourism. The use of information technology, in particular, has grown from the viewpoint of the customers (tourists). It can be considered as one of the most influential technologies that changes the behavior of tourists. While the number of Internet users is constantly growing and reaches 1.5 billion [35], the diffusion of information technologies has improved the offer of tourist services in terms of efficiency, quality and flexibility. The European online tourism market has generated 41 million Euros in 2006, and 15-20% of

all travel expenses were paid via Internet (PhoCusWright, 2004). Although the Internet is an important tool for information searching and purchasing of products, most customers still use different sales channels in their decision-making. Generally, 60 percent of customers, who look for information online, end up doing the purchasing offline (Fittkau and Maass, 2005). The same goes for tourism - the majority of online customers use multiple ways of purchasing their travel products (PhoCusWright, 2005).

As a result, in order to improve the quality of online services, it is necessary to continuously adapt the online marketing strategy to the needs of customers, based on measurements of their satisfaction and experience. There are an increasing number of research papers that deal with the issue of the quality of travel websites, in order to identify their essential elements and develop a successful website in a new touristic e-business environment. Customer satisfaction with websites that offer tourist services (hotels, agencies, booking systems, etc.) will affect their choice in the way of buying these services. There are also other factors that influence the use of the Internet to search for information and/or reservations and purchasing.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of demographic and travel characteristics of travelers on the way they book accommodation, as well as see the importance of various attributes of hotels for making travelers' decisions about choosing the hotel, so as to apply this knowledge in creating better online marketing strategies for hotels.

2 Literature review

2.1 The impact of ICT on the distribution of tourist services

In the era before the Internet, providers of tourist services had no other choice but to use intermediaries,

such as travel agencies and tour-operators, for their distribution.

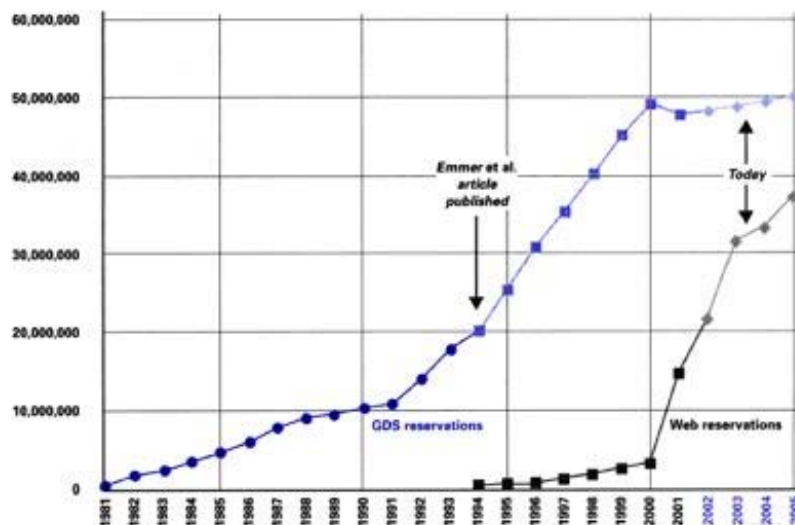


Figure 1. GDS and Web Reservations, Source: GDS-booking figures courtesy of HEDNA

Central reservation systems (CRS) and global distribution systems (GDS) facilitated the intermediary process. Long before the World Wide Web and the 'e-business boom', GDS enabled tourism entities to participate in the global market by successfully linking them despite technological limitations of the day – limitations that do not even exist nowadays (limited databases, delays in updating data into the system, connectivity of CRS and GDS). Electronic sales in the travel industry started their development long before terms such as B2C and B2B emerged. Why? Products and services related to travel are ideal for electronic sale. Travel booking is based on information as a result of the characteristics of tourism products: intangibility, heterogeneity and geographic fixation. Both sides of the tourist market recognized that, supply and demand, and its interest affected the development of many forms of electronic distribution in tourism. As a response to the strengthening of e-distribution, threatened traditional intermediaries (agencies) also began to develop ways of being included on the electronic market by offering innovative services. Although the market image, from the emergence of GDS to this day, has been significantly modified, supported by electronic distribution channels and fulfilling itself with many new actors, the importance of GDS is still huge, and the number of reservations, after a small decline in 2001 and a slowdown, however, continues to grow (Figure 1).

The Internet has enabled organizations to distribute products through direct distribution, and through a network of channels. Intermediaries involved online travel agencies, as well as search engines, which were able to distribute static and dynamic information, like availability and prices. Electronic intermediaries also grew dynamically,

defiant to traditional distributors. For example, Expedia and Lastminute.com are now challenging business models of large agencies, such as Thomas Cook or TUI, forcing them to revise their operations and strategy. In addition, Web 2.0., as TripAdvisor.com, allows users to interact. These changes are forcing all tourist organizations to think about changing business models and value chains.

Using Web Solutions, the booking sales cycle included various intermediaries on the path from the supplier (hotel) to the buyer (customer), resulting in the emergence of the negative aspects of increased technological capabilities. In some cases [10], the number of intermediaries between hotel room and guest would climb up to five, making the distribution more complex and expensive. Because of that, service providers must carefully choose the appropriate booking channel or combination of booking channels, not neglecting their own website and direct online marketing. Most hotels use booking opportunities through their own website, saving money on agency commissions, but in such a case, being acquainted with the customers becomes very important because it is otherwise difficult to reach out to the guests.

For the past three years, Hospitality eBusiness Strategies, Inc. (HeBS), a leading global management consultancy company in the field of Internet marketing in hospitality, has been carrying out research, which monitors U.S. and Western Europe hoteliers' investments in Internet marketing. One of the main findings of the latest study [13] shows that the hotel business in year 2009 will give a great advantage to online marketing and will embrace the Internet as the most cost-effective tool in generating revenue. This year, online distribution channels will actually be the only distribution channels with traffic

growth, which hoteliers have recognized and intend to make use of.

The HeBS's other studies also point out the positive trends in Internet marketing of hospitality.

55.7% hoteliers are convinced that Internet marketing provides the best results. 63% of them plan to increase

Table 1. Hotels in Croatia - sources of in-advance reservations

	Croatia	Istria	Kvarner	North and Middle Dalmatia	South Dalmatia	Continental	Zagreb
Tour-operator	34,2%	43,0%	24,9%	45,1%	29,9%	2,5%	16,5%
Travel agency	33,8%	30,8%	41,7%	37,4%	27,3%	31,0%	23,9%
Direct query	15,5%	14,5%	18,2%	8,6%	10,5%	33,5%	26,7%
Own reservation system	6,6%	7,9%	7,5%	2,9%	5,6%	16,0%	2,8%
Own web site	5,3%	3,1%	6,3%	3,5%	9,4%	10,3%	8,5%
Other Internet sites	1,4%	0,5%	0,6%	1,1%	5,4%	0,5%	4,2%
GDS	1,2%	0,1%	0,0%	0,0%	4,4%	0,0%	9,9%
Representative of the hotel	0,9%	0,0%	0,4%	0,2%	1,0%	2,0%	7,4%
Independent reservation system	0,8%	0,1%	0,2%	0,0%	6,4%	0,5%	0,0%
Transport company	0,5%	0,0%	0,2%	1,1%	0,3%	3,8%	0,0%
Altogether	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: Hotel business in Croatia 2007, Horwath Consulting Zagreb, data are for year 2006

investments in Internet marketing in year 2009, and from them, the majority will increase more than 15% of their allocating funds from offline to online activities. The use of Web 2.0 tools in marketing in year 2009 will be significantly different from previous years - hoteliers will use these opportunities in more creative ways, advertising on the so-called social websites (e.g. TripAdvisor), creating their profiles in social networks and blogging on the hotel website. Almost half of the respondents believe that their hotel is not making use of online marketing to its full potential, primarily due to lack of internal resources and knowledge of an area that is developing very dynamically. The vast majority of hoteliers (81.6%) believe that optimizing their websites will bring best direct marketing and achieve maximum ROI.

It is important to look at data on the use of distribution channels in hotels in Croatia (Table 1). According to a study by Horwath Consulting Zagreb [12], sources of in-advance booking in Croatia, still in the large majority, come from traditional sources - tour operators (34.2%) and travel agencies (33.8%). Distribution channels supported by ICT have very small shares in booking: own reservation system 6.6%, own web site 5.3%, other Web Sites 1.4%, global distribution system 1.2%, and independent reservation systems 0.8%. Data slightly vary by region. The only major discrepancy is in hotels using the GDS systems (9.9%).

2.2 The impact of ICT on travel demand

ICT allows travelers to access reliable and accurate information, as well as the possibility of making reservations in much less time, and with less expenses and inconveniences than required by conventional methods. ICT can help improve the

quality of services and contribute to greater customer/traveler satisfaction. The development of ICT and especially the Internet has created "new" tourists, who have become aware of and are looking for a value for their money and time. They are less interested in monitoring the mass of tourist packages and much more zealous in seeking their own priorities and timetables. More and more, travel packages are losing the market to the benefit of independent tourism with dynamic packages (Figure 2).

Internet has changed the tourist services users' behavior [22]. Future travelers have direct access to much larger sources of information, tourist organizations, private corporations and other users. ICT provides a range of tools which simplify and improve the process of finding information. Users themselves search for information on travel, buying airplane tickets online, online booking of accommodation and other facilities, rather than relying on travel agencies to do it for them. Due to the popularity of Internet applications, most travel organizations, such as hotels, airlines and travel agencies, introduced Internet technology as part of their marketing and communication strategies.

Potential tourists are becoming more independent and sophisticated with a wide range of tools to the realization of a journey. This includes the reservation system and online travel agencies (like Expedia and Fastbooking), Internet search engines (like Google and Kayak), destination management systems (e.g. visitcroatia.net), social networks (like Facebook) and Web 2.0 portals (such as Wayne and TripAdvisor), sites for comparing prices (such as Kelkoo), as well as individual pages of the suppliers and intermediaries. Prices are a big factor in eTourism because many organizations use ICT to communicate directly with users of "web-only" prices and conditions (only for

direct inquiries via the Internet), giving discounts earned by saving money on paying agency commissions.

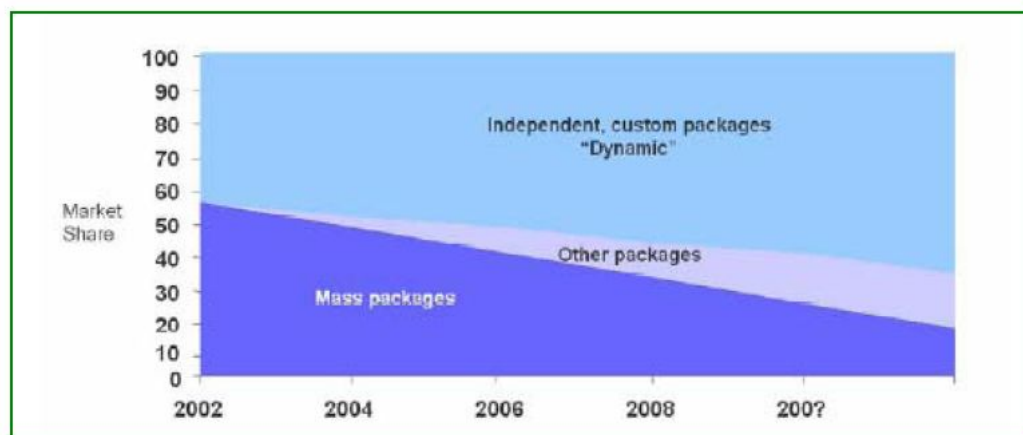


Figure 2. Market segment of touristic packages [15]

The Internet is one of the most influential technologies that has changed the behavior of travelers. Earlier research has shown that tourists who search the Internet had a tendency to spend more money in destinations where they wanted to go than those who have consulted other sources of information [6]. The Internet provides customers direct contact with suppliers, thereby bypassing all the rings in the chain. Also, it has enabled interactive dynamics with suppliers and destinations, often accompanied with the request for a special personalized offer. Currently, there is a large increase in the number of users who book directly on hotel websites [14]. Due to the rapid development of the Internet, the expected response time of the organization is greatly reduced, so that the response of the organization can significantly affect user satisfaction and decision provisions.

According to the survey [34], reasons for not buying travel products and packages available online are lack of personal services, security reasons, lack of experience, and spending time. Weber and Roehl [28] have found that people who buy travel products online are probably present on the internet four or more years, and that can build trust between users and online operations through the positive experience of previous transactions [5]. PhoCusWright research has shown that for the first time ever, online travel reservations will make half of all travel transactions in the United States in 2007 [31]. In order to have the greatest possible share in this profitable online business, tourism and hotel management must constantly enhance its competitive advantages by focusing its resources on the virtual business environment. Numerous studies have investigated the importance of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer experience in virtual environments, but it is necessary to fully understand how the quality of the website, customer satisfaction and their intention to purchase interact in

the area of tourism and hotel industry. The quality of the website has a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction and intention to purchase online [4], so it is necessary for travel and hotel companies to make their customers satisfied, so as to make them e-buyers, and not only e-searchers. While in other industries there is a growing number of proposed approaches in the development of websites, in tourism a uniform evaluating standard of website quality that would ensure the achievement of the objective is still missing. The functionality and usability of websites is important to the users, but more detailed knowledge of user behavior should be continuously monitored and tracked in order to respond to constant changes in requirements and to influence critical decision-making, concerning the purchase. Some users are more interested in information about the destination and contacts; others see the selection of languages as being important; and yet others find the attractive design and graphic presentation of content crucial, all of this depending on several factors, such as cultural differences, age and so on. A successful website should take into consideration the users' interests of content, and therefore make changes and provide personalized communication and services. Hoteliers have to consistently evaluate their website to maximize customer efficiency. Poor web design results in 50% lower sales, and negative experience leads to a 40%-reduction of potential repeated guests [9].

Although there are enough options for users on the Internet, psychological barriers often prevent users from completing the transaction online, resulting in offline purchase. With less time spent on waiting and planning, and with more time for enjoyment, users would, through Internet travel sites, safely book and receive tickets at home [23]. In addition, e-shopping provides broad geographical coverage that users can take the best advantage of. Tourism is the leading eTrade industry [33]. However, as eTrade payment is

the most important part, users are concerned for the safety of transactions. Such concern is a potential consequence of computer crime, which is actually the primary factor of user discouragement of giving their credit card numbers. There is also an issue of privacy, which is addressed by many users. This leads us to a situation where many travelers use the Internet to seek information about the destination, but book and/or buy services offline. Internet sites should devote more attention to make the users feel safe and comfortable in order to complete the transaction that they began [7].

It is interesting to observe how Internet is used in many ways for different marketing segments. For example, the way of request information has a strong connection to the demographic and life characteristics. Enabling users to develop their online profile in which they will have their private information in order to enter their own priorities, enables tourist organizations to provide better service. Also, comprehending how different marketing segments understand different tourism products and services increases the possibility of presenting the suitable product. Lastminute.com, for example, collects the appropriate information to personalize the weekly brochure, which is sent to users, as well as identifying what content users clicked, so as to personalize future campaigns even more. Demographic and environment information are critical for profiling. For example, for a long time the answer to the question "Where to go on holiday?" was considered as the joint decision between the husband and wife. In recent years, children have a key role in the decision [27]. Children are often looking for fun, games and chat rooms on the Internet. Keeping that in mind, for touristic attractions targeting children, the managers have to provide content for children, like interactive games, to attract them to come to their site. With the growing popularity of the Internet, teenagers are not the only ones looking for information online; the older members of society (e.g. 50 and over) are becoming active Internet users as well. Information on flights and accommodation are the most sought titles for users between 50 and 60 years, and most of them are not interested in arrangement packages [11]. As a result, we can conclude that the users have expressed their increasing interest in eTourism.

2.3 Hotel attributes in the hotel-selecting decision

Hotel attributes are services and facilities that hotels offer, whose features affect the customer and his choice among different products [18]. These attributes that directly affect the decision-making are 'determining attributes': they can cause a desire to buy and differentiate this desire in relation to the competition offer [1]. Perceptions of hotel attributes can be defined as the degree of importance that tourists attach to a variety of hotel services and

facilities in meeting their wants and needs [30]. Atkinson [3] showed that guests, when selecting a hotel, consider the following attributes to be the most important, listed in order of priority: cleanliness of accommodation units, security, received 'value for money', kindness and hospitality of the staff. Wilensky and Butt [29] showed that the guests evaluated staff, the hotel's physical attractiveness, relaxation opportunities, service standards, an impressive image and 'value for money' as the most significant services. Rivers, Toh and Alaoui [25] have explored the decision-making of choosing the hotel with guests who are members of the membership program and those who are not. The results showed that the appropriate location and the service on the whole are the most important hotel attributes. Ananth, DeMicco, Moreo and Howey [2] conducted a survey on 510 tourists in which they had to assess the importance of 57 hotel attributes for choosing the hotel. The results showed that the attributes 'price and quality' are marked as the most important in all age groups, followed by attributes related to 'safety' and 'location'. LeBlanc and Nguyen [16] explored in detail the five factors that reflect the image of hotels: physical environment, corporate identity, service personnel, quality of service and accessibility. The results of various studies indicate that guests, when choosing a hotel, select cleanliness, location, price of accommodation, security, quality of service and hotel reputation as the most important attributes.

In further studies of guests' behavior during hotel selection, the differences in the priorities of choosing factors between the different types of guests were examined. Many studies have examined the difference between business and leisure guests. They suggest that the business guests put cleanliness and location) in first place ([19], [21], [26], while the leisure guests choose safety, personal contact and accommodation prices as the most important factors ([8], [18], [20], [24]).

From the aforementioned, it can be concluded that hotel attributes have different value in selecting a hotel. There are factors that are important to all guests, but there are differences in priorities between different kinds of guests. Evaluating the success of the hotel from the view of its customers (guests) can improve the hotel management's understanding of customer satisfaction, which ultimately leads to the return of the guests to the hotel [3].

3 Methodology

The questionnaire for this study included two main sections. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to elicit demographic and traveling information about the respondents (gender, age, nationality, reservation method, nature of visit). The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 6 hotel attributes, for which the guests had to rate the importance when choosing a hotel, and of 6 hotel

areas, for which guests were asked to rate the importance of the access to broadband Internet in those areas. The 6 hotel attributes were identified based on a review of relevant literature and based on the aims of this particular study. The 6 hotel areas were identified based on the typical areas hotels consist of.

The questionnaire was structured so that each hotel attribute and each hotel area were rated using a 10-point scale, ranging from 1, as least important, to 10, most important. To capture a wider range of respondents, the questionnaire was printed in English.

The sample chosen in this study included international and domestic guests who stayed in the Excelsior, Bellevue and Dubrovnik Palace hotels during April and May 2009. All three hotels are 5 star hotels and are situated in Dubrovnik. The questionnaires were distributed in hotel rooms and generated a total of 181 responses.

4 Results and discussion

Table 2 shows the demographic and travel characteristics of visitors. Age limit of 50 years divided respondents into two equal groups (55 percent are younger than 50, and 45 percent older) which makes a substantial share of the older guests. According to gender, respondents are equally represented with slightly higher percentages in favor of the male population (58%). The largest proportion of respondents originate from the countries of Western Europe (almost 40%), followed by the rest of Europe with 20 percent, the United States with 16 percent, Croatia with 15 percent, and the rest of the world with 8 percent. These data also confirm the higher category of guests.

The most represented booking method among the respondents is reservation through a travel agency at about 40 percent, while second and third place, being very close, are the Internet (27.5%) and own company

(28.1%). A very small fraction, typically, belongs to 'walk in' guests (3%).

For more than half of the respondents the reason for travel is a conference (57%). After that followed respondents whose nature of visit is leisure (27%), 10.7 percent of respondents make group tours, and only 5 percent are on an ordinary business trip.

4.1 Booking methods with respect to the nature of visit

A more detailed analysis of booking methods with regard to the nature of visit is shown in the Figures 3-6 to get further information about the guests who book via the Internet.

Respondents, whose nature of visit was the conference (Figure 3), booked accommodation at the hotel mostly through travel agencies and their own companies (almost 80 percent). However, the percentage of those who had booked over the Internet is not negligible (20%). Respondents, who were on regular business trips (Figure 4), booked in only two ways: through travel agencies or their own companies. Not a single customer booked through the Internet.

Respondents, who belong to the group tours (Figure 5), in the large majority booked through travel agencies (about 70 percent). This type of guest does not book through the Internet as they do not search for accommodation individually.

The largest share of bookings through the Internet were made by guests, whose nature of visit was leisure (Figure 6) - even 62 percent of their reservations had been made online.

From the data above we can see that only people, whose nature of visit was a conference or holiday, used the Internet to book accommodation at the hotel. This information is very important in that a large number of guests who individually organize their trip, will book accommodation in a hotel directly via the Internet.

Table 2. Demographic and traveling characteristics of the respondents

Age		Country of residence		Gender	
<20	0,6%	Croatia	15,4%	Male	58,0%
21 - 30	11,7%	Western Europe	39,5%	Female	42,0%
31 - 40	23,9%	Europe - other	20,4%		
41 - 50	18,3%	USA	16,0%		
>51	45,6%	Other	8,6%		
Type of reservation		Nature of visit			
Internet	27,5%	Conference	57,3%		
Travel agent	41,3%	Business travel	5,1%		
Own company	28,1%	Group tour	10,7%		
"Walk in"	3,0%	Leisure	27,0%		

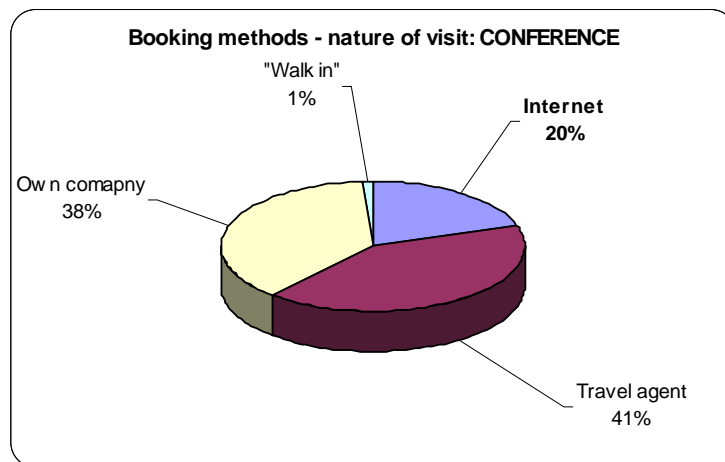


Figure 3. Booking methods share - nature of visit: conference

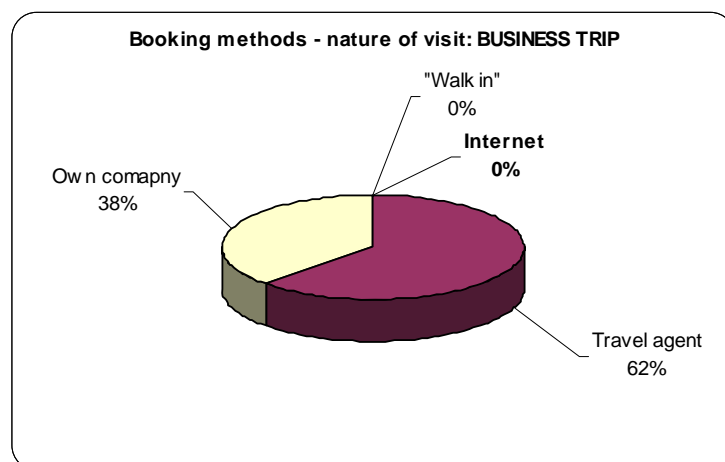


Figure 4. Booking methods share - nature of visit: business trip

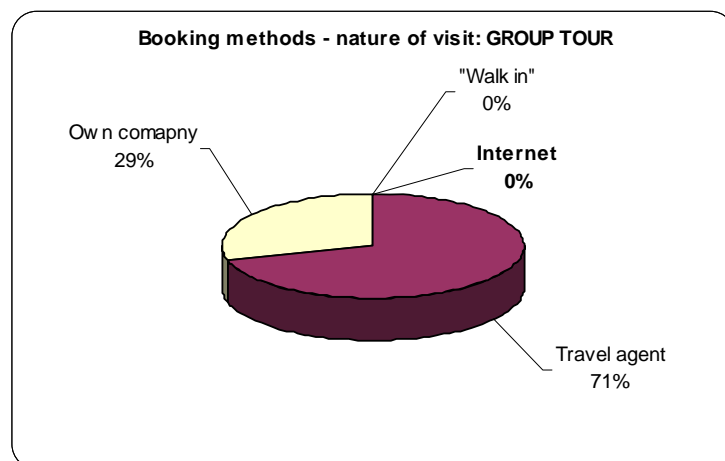


Figure 5. Booking methods share - nature of visit: group tour

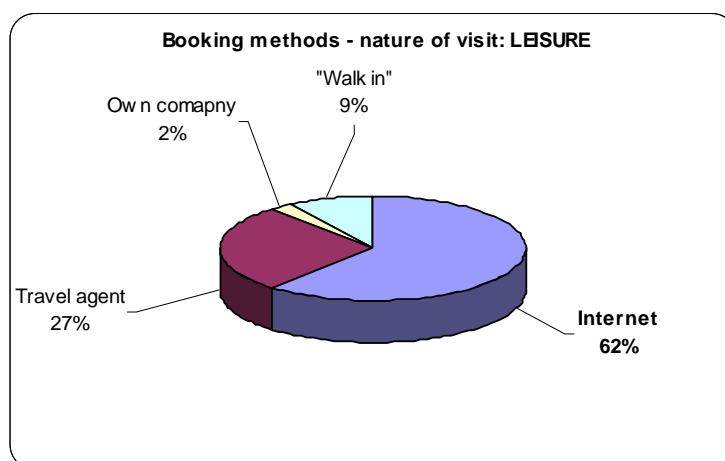


Figure 6. Booking methods share - nature of visit: leisure

4.2 Booking methods with respect to the demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 3 shows the shares of each booking method with respect to the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The ways of booking between women and men do not differ significantly. The share of online reservations amongst women is somewhat bigger (about 32%) than amongst men (23%).

Considering the age of the respondents, who booked over the Internet, we can conclude that the differences between the age groups are not great. The smallest share of online reservations belongs to the age group 41 to 50 years (22%), and the biggest share

of online reservations belongs to respondents aged 31 to 40 years. No age group had an extremely low or extremely high share of online reservations.

Differences between the share of online bookings by the countries of origin of respondents were somewhat larger, but one should be particularly alert to the small sample size of some of the groups (e.g. there were only 14 respondents from the USA). Most online reservations come from the countries of Western Europe (40%), and least from Croatia (4%).

From the data on the demographic characteristics of respondents and the ways of booking, we did not recognize any important indicators of the specificities of guests, who book their accommodation at the hotel over the Internet.

Table 3. Booking methods with respect to the demographic characteristics of the respondents

	Internet	Travel agent	Own company	"Walk in"
AGE				
Male	23,7%	41,2%	32,0%	3,1%
Female	31,9%	42,0%	23,2%	2,9%
AGE				
21 - 30	30,0%	40,0%	20,0%	10,0%
31 - 40	31,6%	34,2%	34,2%	0,0%
41 - 50	21,9%	34,4%	43,8%	0,0%
>51	26,7%	48,0%	21,3%	4,0%
COUNTY OF RESIDENCE				
Croatia	4,0%	52,0%	32,0%	12,0%
Western Europe	40,7%	28,8%	27,1%	3,4%
Europe - other	17,2%	41,4%	41,4%	0,0%
USA	11,1%	88,9%	0,0%	0,0%
Other	34,6%	38,5%	26,9%	0,0%

4.3 The importance of broadband Internet to hotel selection

The respondents rated each hotel using a 10-point scale, ranging from 1, least important to 10, most important. Table 4 shows the arithmetic mean values of the rated attributes. According to the data, the most important factor, when choosing the hotel, is the price of accommodation with a very high mean value of the importance grades (8.7). The importance of broadband Internet services in the hotel is on the next to last place with the grade 6.5.

Table 4. Mean ratings of hotel attributes importance

Hotel attributes (selection factors)	Importance rate	
	Mean ^a	St.Dev.
Accommodation rates	8,7	2,0
Hotel location	8,2	2,1
Wellness & Spa	7,1	2,8
Special offers	6,9	2,7
Broadband Internet	6,5	3,0
Meeting rooms	5,8	3,5

^a Mean scale: 1 - least important to 10 - most important

Furthermore, we wanted to examine whether the importance of broadband Internet for hotel selection decision depends on the characteristics of guests and whether it is perhaps higher with guests who book through the Internet. Figure 7 shows a comparison of arithmetic mean values of importance of hotel selection factors between groups of respondents who had booked online and those who did not. The results show that for the respondents who have booked accommodation through the Internet, the importance

of broadband Internet in the hotel is somewhat less important (6.74) than for those who did not book through the Internet (7.29).

4.4 The importance of broadband Internet in various hotel areas

Respondents evaluated the importance of access to broadband internet in different hotel areas in the following way: the most important is Internet access in rooms (average grade 8.8), then in the lobby of the hotel (7.1). In the restaurant (5.6), bar (5.2), at the pool (4.9) and beach (4.7) the importance is medium and almost equal (Table 5).

Table 5. Mean ratings of broadband Internet in various hotel areas

Hotel area	Importance rate	
	Mean ^a	St.Dev.
Rooms	8,8	2,5
Lobby	7,1	3,0
Restaurant	5,6	3,5
Bar	5,2	3,6
Indoor pool	4,9	3,5
Beach Area	4,7	3,5

^a Mean scale: 1 - least important to 10 - most important

If we compare the mean values of importance grades for broadband Internet in various hotel areas between respondents who have booked accommodation through the Internet and those who did not (Figure 8), we see that the grades are generally equal, and generally somewhat lower with respondents who had booked online.

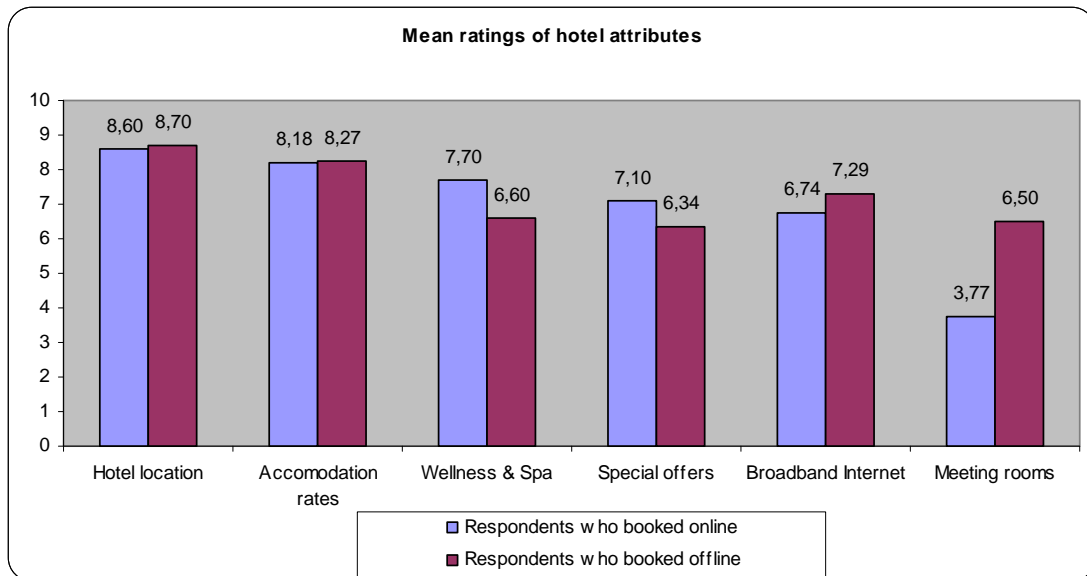


Figure 7. Comparison of hotel selection factors (attributes) importance ratings

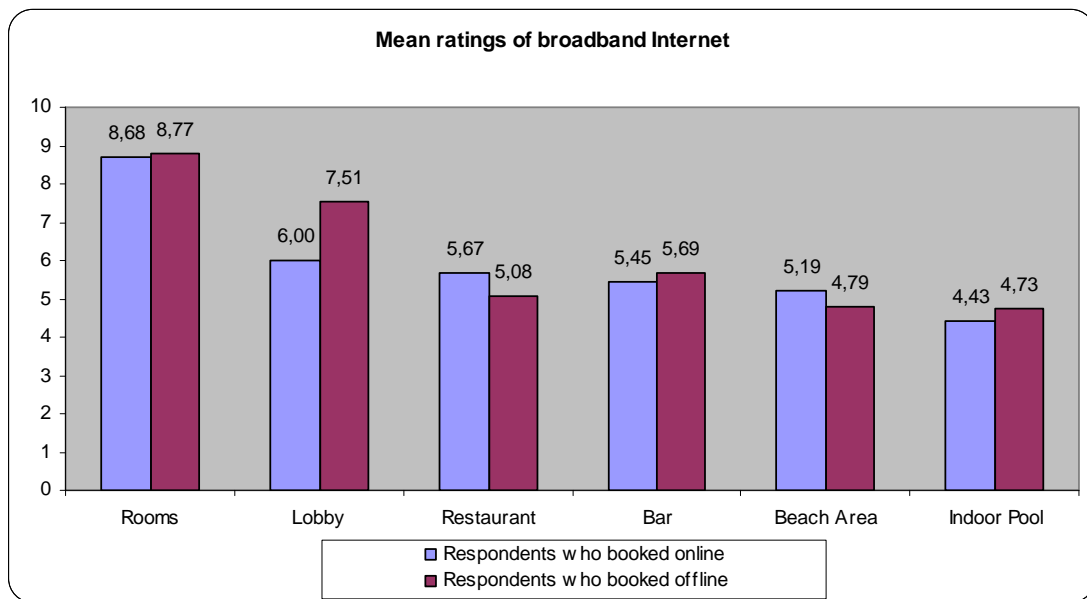


Figure 8. Comparison of broadband Internet importance ratings

5 Conclusion

This study tested the differences in booking methods compared to demographic and travel characteristics of the hotel guests and the importance of broadband Internet, also in relation to demographic and travel characteristics of the guests, as well as booking methods.

In terms of booking methods we wanted to question guests who book through the Internet. Out of the total number of respondents, 27.5 percent booked the accommodation via the Internet, which is a significant share of the total reservations, although that percentage covers only one third of the four possible booking methods. Guests who have booked accommodation through the Internet do not significantly differ by gender and age, and concerning the origin of respondents, there is a significant difference in favor of Western Europe countries. The booking method significantly depends on the nature of travel, so respondents who were on a business trip or group tour, did not book through the Internet; guests whose reason for visits was a conference were largely booked through the Internet (20 percent), as well as more than half of the leisure guests who were on holiday.

The research showed that broadband Internet service is of average importance when choosing the hotel, and the service is valued equally both by respondents, who booked through the Internet, and those who did not. Apart from broadband Internet service, other hotel attributes were valued equally important by respondents, who had booked via the Internet, and those who did not.

Based on these results, the hotel online strategy should be based on tourists' market segments according to the nature of travel, taking into account that these groups showed the greatest differences in the scope of online booking.

The technological revolution grasped through the development of the Internet has significantly changed the market conditions of tourist organizations. Fast development of ICT provided new tools for tourist marketing and management. It allows interaction between tourist organizations and users and as a result changes the entire process of development, management and marketing in tourism. By reviewing literature, one can notice that research in the field of eTourism is still in its early stages and that numerous questions have only but been raised.

The future of eTourism will be oriented towards the users and to the technology that rotates around them, providing dynamic communication with tourist organizations. Users have become extremely powerful and are more able to determine the elements of tourist products. Also, they have become more sophisticated and experienced, and thus have become harder to satisfy. Innovations in technology will help mutual action, personalization and constant networking. Therefore, it is necessary to design strategies and tactics that will take advantage of the opportunities ICT has to offer and turn them in favor of tourist organizations. There are many ideas for further research, because the complex nature of human behavior, the constant changes in the environment and the various e-technologies in their activities create many opportunities to tourist companies for innovative activities and use of new and still unrecognized opportunities. Given the mass of participants in tourist transactions, it is relatively easy

and possible to collect a large number of data with the help of current technology. Even repeated studies can be meaningful, because in time it can give new results.

Technology offers many possibilities, about which a lot has been written in this study, but technology alone can not provide answers to all questions if they are not asked. In the same way that potential guests today are exposed to a (too) large number of options, having in mind the fast access to information, the service providers are sometimes lost in the possibilities of extending the budget on various sides. Although they all care to monitor the profitability of investments in each information channel, getting to a maximum profit is still missing in the numerous examples, and corrective measures are taken too late. It is assumed that it is still critical to know the users, as well as to act in accordance with the specific knowledge. Knowledge of the causes and consequences is, in simple terms, what should be achieved. In this direction, many issues can be raised, relating to the customer, his/her characteristics, the way in which he/she 'came' to the hotel (information, booking and paying accommodation) as well as the various factors that lead to his/her decision.

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