

Why Should Internet Utilization in Travel Industry Really Matter? Case of Serbia

Ana Jovičić, Anđelija Ivkov-Džigurski, Tatjana Pivac, Marko D. Petrović, and Snježana Gagić

Abstract—In today's world, leisure time is supposed to be a happy, satisfactory time when one fulfills their needs. Traveling is an especially significant aspect of leisure time. The aim of this study is to identify the basic ways of spending leisure time of Serbian residents, with a focus on their traveling habits, on a sample of 257 respondents. The task of the study is to examine the level of Internet utilization when inquiring about tourist destination, tourist organizations and accommodation capacities and to determine the significance of Internet in making decisions when traveling. The research results have shown that lack of funds is the limiting factor in satisfying the need for traveling for Serbian residents. The Republic of Serbia is a country rich with natural and anthropogenic resources and tourism development in Serbia would enhance spending leisure time and satisfying people's needs to travel. Considering the research results which show that Internet content and the tourist, travel organizers' and accommodation capacity offer affect choosing a specific tourist offer. In order to advertise its tourism in the future, The Republic of Serbia should improve its offer by using the advantages of the information technology, primarily Internet.

Index Terms—Internet, leisure time, Serbia, travel habits.

I. INTRODUCTION

Leisure time appeared as a phenomenon with the development of the industrial society and with the division of time to work hours and the time which is work-free, when the individual can satisfy their need of self-actualization. Leisure time activities are supposed to provide joy, pleasure and relaxation to the individual.

There are numerous ways to spend leisure time. Since the founding of the Republic of Serbia, there was no research in this area on a national level which deals with all of the age structures of the population. There has been research on how certain categories of people such as children, young people [1]–[3], adults [4] and old people [5] spend their leisure time.

The aim of the research is to determine the extent to which traveling is significant as an aspect of spending leisure time of Serbian residents and their traveling habits, as well as define the possible direction of development of Serbian tourism.

Is Internet able to contribute to tourism development in

Manuscript received November 22, 2012; revised December 29, 2012. The paper is the result of the research within the projects number 176020 funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia.

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Serbia? Since the official advent of Internet in Serbia in 1996, the number of Internet users increases every day. According to data from the Statistical office from 2010, 41.2% households in Serbia in connected to Internet, and 44.4% have users have used Internet during last year, and 31% of households use Internet every day. With the expansion of Internet utilization in Serbia, there has been an increase in the significance of Internet for the purpose of tourism, which would provide access to useful and current tourist information and facilitate it to them. The study will determine o what extent Serbian residents use Internet when choosing travel destinations or assessing the quality of the tourist product and services.

II. TRAVEL HABITS

The basic socioeconomic assumptions of the development of tourism are leisure time and free funds. Travel decisions are conceptualized as a mental structure that comprises a hierarchically arranged set of action plans [6]–[9]. Pearce, Morrison and Rutledge [10] defined tourist motivation "as the global integrating network of biological and cultural forces which gives value and direction to travel choices, behavior and experience", Many studies explain the affect of some factors on the decision of tourists to visit a certain destination [11]–[14]. The basic division of travel motivations is to push and pull factors [15]–[20]. Personal characteristics, environment, the degree of culture and personal motivation mostly shape the tourist behavior. A modern tourist, led by the principle "value for the money invested" chooses certain tourist destinations, taking the additional possibilities of entertainment, being informed and learning new things into consideration. Financial constraints, lack of leisure time, physical constraints, family issues, lack of interest and psychological boundaries are not stimulating to traveling [21].

III. INTERNET UTILISATION

Since its inception Internet has been significant means of communication and distribution of information for tourists [22]–[24]. On one hand, new technologies provide with more efficient marketing organization in tourism with the realisation of personalised communication with the current and future users in real time [25]–[27], and on the other hand they provide the users with information about numerous elements of the tourist offer which could affect their decision in relation to traveling. In tourism, an increasing number of services provided to the tourists are being based on Internet utilisation as a main communication channel, which allows simultaneous decrease in business expenses and increase in

number of clients. Internet allows users to find information, plan and organize their vacation. Various tourist products can be offered on Internet, and such offer is highly transparent. In tourist sector, a Website is the most important platform of electronic commerce. Today Internet is being used massively in tourist market in the promotion, distribution and branding of tourist destinations and products. In the process of inquiring about the trip, planning a vacation, reservation and purchase of tourist service as well as making an impression about the destination/experience, an increasing number of tourists use online technology. It is important to mention that owing to the new concept, the current and potential tourists are able to form their virtual community, where they can share information, favourite websites, photos, videos etc.

IV. METHODOLOGY

"The Research on How Serbian Residents Spend Leisure Time" has been conducted through an online questionnaire, from November 24th, 2011 to January 13th, 2012. The number of respondents was 257. The questionnaire consists of three parts, the first part deals with socio-demographic variables; the second part includes questions about leisure time, while the third part connects leisure time and traveling. The questionnaire consists of 49 items, of which 48 are closed-ended questions. The results of travel habits and ways of spending leisure time and Internet utilisation in traveling are shown in this paper. The data has been processed with the use of the SPSS program 17.00. The results analysis is in descriptive statistics and the Chi-Square test.

There were 68.52% female respondents and 31.5% male respondents. Most of the respondents (61.5%) are between 21 and 30 years of age and between 31 and 40 years (18.3%). Most of the respondents are employed (50.2%), while students make the other large group (38.9%). According to their education, 31.5% have a bachelor degree, 24.5% have graduated from high-school and 20.2% have graduated from college. Most of the respondents are single (56.4%) and 31.1% are married. According to the monthly salary, most of the respondents earn less than 200 euro (40.1%).

V. RESULTS

When asked how much they travel in a year, most of the respondents answered they do so once or twice a year (45.9%), 29.9% of the respondents travel six times a year, 18.3% travel more than six times a year and 5.8% never travel. Those who never travel in most cases stated lack of money as a constraint (70%) as well as lack of leisure time (25%), while other state that they do not travel because of health reasons, they are not motivated or they do not like to travel.

The research attempted to determine how much money Serbian residents spend on traveling. Almost half of the respondents (42.8%) stated they spend less than 500 euro a year, while 29.6% spend between 500 and 1000 euro, and 27.6% spend more than € 1000.

When asked where they mostly travel, the answer was quite uniformed, although most of the respondents (55.6%) travel across the country and 44.4% travel abroad.

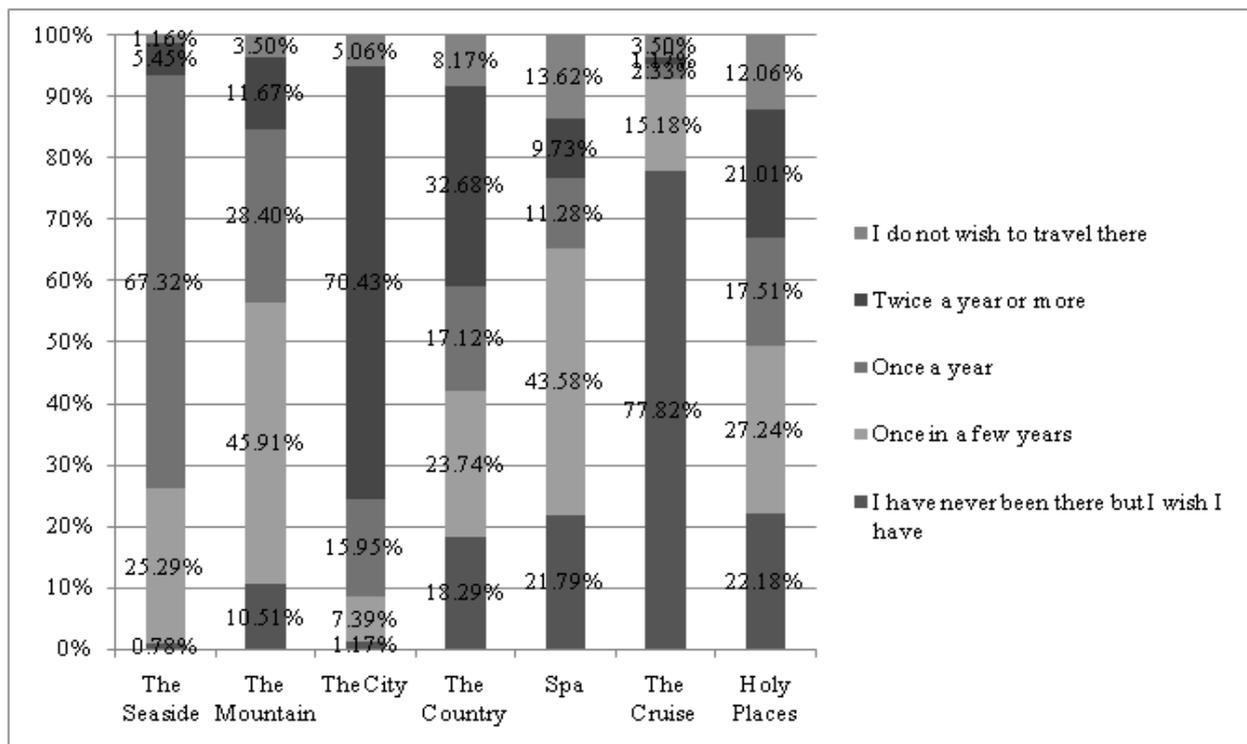


Fig. 1. Destinations most frequently visited by Serbian residents

Fig. 1 shows to which extent the respondents travel to the following destinations: the seaside, the mountains, the urban environment, the spa, the cruise and the holy places. The Fig. 1 shows that 67.3% of the respondents go to the seaside once

a year or once in a few years (25.3%), while a small number of the respondents do so more than once a year. Almost half of the respondents (45.9%) go to the mountains once in a few years and a small number do so once a year (28.4%). While

70.4% of the respondents visit cities once or twice a year, 15.9% do so once a year. Most of the respondents go to the country twice a year or more (32.7%), once a year (23.7%) or once in a few years (23.7%). 43.6% of the respondents go to the spa once in a few years. Only 15.2% travel get on a cruise and only a small number of respondents do so often. Most of the respondents visit holy places once in a few years (27.2%), once a year (17.5%) or more than once a year (21.1%). Apart from the frequency, the respondents were able to choose the destination they did not visit and they wish to. Most of the respondents (77.82%) stated they have never got on a cruise and they wish they have, 22.78% wish to visit holy places, spas (21.8%) and the country, the mountains, the urban environment and the seaside. When asked where they would not like to travel, most of the respondents stated they have no interest in visiting spas (13.6%) and holy places (12.1%) The urban environment, the mountains, the cruise and the seaside follow.

Table I shows travel motivation of Serbian residents. Mean rank and standard deviation are also shown on the Table II. Experiencing something new, visiting sights, escaping the daily routine, familiarizing with the local people and the culture are the strongest motives, while health reasons and satisfying the need for recreation are less significant. The respondents are neutral to enjoying gastronomic specialties.

TABLE I: TRAVEL MOTIVATION

| Item | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|-----|------|----------------|
| I travel to familiarize with the local people and the culture | 257 | 3.98 | 1.073 |
| I travel to experience something new | 257 | 4.49 | .834 |
| I travel to enjoy gastronomic specialties | 257 | 3.45 | 1.158 |
| I travel to visit sights | 257 | 4.13 | .970 |
| I travel to escape the daily routine | 257 | 4.05 | 1.198 |
| I travel to satisfy the need for recreation | 257 | 3.19 | 1.276 |
| I travel for health | 257 | 2.80 | 1.322 |
| I travel to meet people from across the world | 257 | 3.91 | 1.097 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 257 | | |

According to the results of the Chi-Square Test, a significant difference has been determined on a 0.05 level - men and women value health as a motive to travel differently $\chi^2(4, n=257)=16.940, p=0.002$. More than 54.3% of male respondents consider health as not a decisive motive to travel, while 29.6% are neutral and only 16.1% state it as decisive. Compared to men, almost 39.8% women consider health as a significant motive to travel.

When asked how they would like to improve their leisure time, 94% of the respondents stated they would like to travel more.

The study attempted to answer to what extent Serbian residents use Internet when choosing a tourist destination and to what extent they use the Web to search, plan and organize their vacation. The study has determined to what extent Serbian residents use social networks, forums, blogs and other software tools in order to inquire about potential destination.

When choosing a tourist destination, 91.28% use Internet and a small percentage (8.72%) do not use Web services.

TABLE II: CHI-SQUARE TESTS

| | Pearson Chi-Square | df | N of Valid Cases | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------|--------------------|----|------------------|-----------------------|
| Gender | 16,940 | 4 | 257 | .002 |

When asked in what way Serbian residents inquire about the tourist offer, 55.34% of the respondents replied they use the Tourist agency website, 11.65% of the respondents informed by newspaper, 18.93% visit the tourist agency, 8.74% inquire through the social network website, while the rest of the respondents (5.34%) inform through recommendation from friends, brochures and catalogues, TV, etc. When asked whether they receive e-mails with the tourist offer from agencies and hotels, the majority of the respondents (61.74%) are not subscribed to the mailing list of these organizations. Out of 38.26% respondents who receive the tourist offer via e-mail, 51.37% read those type of e-mails and save them in their inbox if they are interested in the offer and search for additional information, 26.03% of the respondents read and delete them, while 22.60% of the respondents delete those type of e-mails immediately without reading them first.

The respondents trust the information about the tourist offer if they hear about it from friends and acquaintances (77.7%), advertisement in media (2.03%) or read on a web service – the agency or the hotel website (14.19%), Facebook page (0.68%) or TripAdvisor (5.41%). On the other hand, the relevance of the tourist agency and the quality of the accommodation are being evaluated mostly based on forum comments (57.82%) and the appearance of the website as well as the information which are offered on the tourist agency or accommodation facility website (22.45%). while 18.37% of the respondents trust the advertisements and the number of fans at the organization fanpage on social networks (1.36%).

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research results have shown that lack of funds is the factor of constraint for Serbian residents to travel. In that sense, the organizers should strive to expand the offer and promote domestic tourism, by creating quality tourist offers which would be a lot more affordable to Serbian residents.

Domestic tourist offers are less attractive and are directed to destinations such as spas, the mountains and the administrative centers, which are the main tourist products of the Republic of Serbia [28]. The Republic of Serbia is a country rich with natural as well as anthropogenic resources, and the development of the domestic tourism would improve spending leisure time of Serbian residents to a great extent as well satisfying their need for traveling. By developing and promoting the new tourist product such as rural and eco tourism, which is directed towards return to the past and enjoying the nature. Those could become an interesting and relaxing way of spending leisure time. Marketing trends are moving in favor of the rural tourism, which is confirmed by the estimations of the World Tourism Organization. The number of the consumers of the rural tourism on a year level in Serbia has a growth of 30%, as well as the construction of the accommodation capacities [29]. The development of the tourist product such as festivals, concerts and other

manifestations could satisfy the cultural needs of the population. The development of the nautical tourism, with the focus on the Danube which flows through Serbia and has many panoramic views and monuments could provide cruising to Serbian residents for a relatively low price.

The promotion of the tourist products and destinations would ensure positive effects on many levels: Serbian residents would travel more and spend their leisure time in a good way, the new tourist product would be developed and the demand would grow, new and revitalized tourist destinations would activate and the growth of the tourist economy would increase.

The organizers of traveling in Serbia are being focused on the tourist offer which includes North Italy, Austria, and Czech Republic which are affordable considering their proximity to Serbia. The research has shown that the most frequent travel motivation for a Serbian resident is to experience something new, visit sights and escape the daily routine and this could be a trigger for the development of the domestic tourism. The need for traveling could easily be satisfied if Serbian residents would be offered good, interesting and affordable tourist offers directed towards domestic destinations.

Tourism strategy of the Republic of Serbia, passed in 2006, covers the Competitiveness Plan, in order to trace the course of tourism development as a strategic economy sector. One of the competitiveness elements considered as highly important and prioritized is the development of the Tourist Information System. Internet is being mentioned as an important source of information for tourists and the means of representing their offer for the tourist agencies. Since 2004, with the increase in 2006, new possibilities have been realized for the placement of the tourist offer via software packages open for active involvement of the users in their creation as well as modeling the representation on a global scale. The Web 2.0 concept is evolutionary innovation in the information and communication technology. Their utilisation is taking roots with forming numerous professional networks and social online communities, which integrate the global association, exchange of information, knowledge, experience and impressions on an individual level without the interfering of the institutions, firms, agencies and associations [30]. Furthermore, it is necessary to use the advantages of social networks, as a significant source of promotion by 'word of mouth', which are more powerful today than the commercial brochures. With the change of conditions the creation of a new profile of Serbian tourist which is more independent, flexible and demanding. The new tourism patterns which have appeared are causing the innovation of the offer of the public and private sector via new tourist products, new ways of marketing and promotional strategy.

Serbia needs a strategic approach to the development of the domestic tourism, since the development of specific tourist offer could contribute to the development of the country, decreasing the trade deficit, increasing employment, improve the image of the country, primarily by using information technologies and encourage foreign investments. In this way the rich cultural heritage of Serbia would be put to function and would present itself to the domestic but also to the world tourist demand.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The paper is the result of the research within the projects number: 176020 "Transformations of Geo Area of Serbia - past, current problems and suggestions of the solutions," funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Republic of Serbia.

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