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**Internet Usage in the Course of Hungarian
Leisure Travels**

THESES OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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1. Aim and structure of dissertation

Ever since the world exists, people have been travelling to participate in different events (e.g. the Olympic Games in ancient times), to get to know new cultures, to take care of their health (e.g. Roman bath trips), to learn (e.g. guildsmen) and to gain new experiences. Due to the development of different means of transport (road, water, and air), travelers can now reach destinations more easily and travel time has become significantly shorter.

Nowadays tourism is getting the limelight from many aspects: as a result of the positive development of international relations with several countries lifting visa requirements, the European Union liberalizing the Sky-space, and therefore low-cost airlines appeared, or because of tragic events like natural disasters, or terror attacks.

Despite the rapid growth of the practical importance of tourism, scientists started to examine this field as late as in the 1920-30, and tried to attempt to create the definition of tourism.

Since then Plog (1972), Cohen (1972, 1974) and Smith (1989) researched the typology of tourists, Bernecker (1962), Morrison (1992), Holloway (1994) and Tasnádi (2002) dealt with the motivation of tourists, Leiperhez (1981), Kaspar (1983) and Lengyel (1994) focused on the system of tourism, while Puczko-Rátz (2002) examined the impacts of tourism. There is, however, a limited number of researchers, who are involved research focusing on the relation between tourism and the internet. In Hungary, there is virtually no one.

The recognition of this shortage justified my topic choice for my doctoral dissertation. Both sides of the leisure market and its relation to internet application is the focus of my research. My aim was to examine the impacts of the application of the internet from the point of view of the customers and from that of tour operators and travel agencies. Consequently, in the first three chapters of my dissertation, I have analyzed international and domestic secondary literature on this subject, focussing on e-tourism.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, the subject of my research is introduced, together with the aim and structure of the dissertation. In the next three chapters I describe the theoretical background of my project. In the first theoretical part I start from the definition of tourism, then outline the environmental impacts on tourism through the international and domestic historical development of tourism. In this part my goal is to introduce the system of tourism and the internet's impact on this industry: e-tourism, the 'new' service industry worldwide. Also in this part I examine the impacts of the internet on the marketing and service industry, especially on tourism through the theory of service marketing elements (7P).

In the second theoretical part, I explain the notion of demand in present-day tourism. My goal is to introduce the changes in buying habits and the shift in consumers' attitudes brought about by the application of the Internet. It is also the goal of this chapter after the description of different tourist typologies and tourist behaviors, to deal with the e-tourist, new consumer of the electronic era.

In the third theoretical part, my research focuses on supply in tourism: transportation companies, accommodation providers, catering units, tour operators and travel agencies. My goal is to introduce the changes in the operation of the above mentioned suppliers triggered by the application of the tools of information and communication technologies.

Following the theoretical chapters, the results of my primary research are discussed. After the mapping of both the demand and supply sides of the tourism market, research proceeds by two dimensions: tour operators and travel agencies. The goal of my empirical research is to give a complex picture of the different forms of Internet applications in the course of leisure travel organization.

In the first part of my research I examined the various leisure travel organization habits of customers, relations between travel information, the Internet and the accessibility of the travel services, and the attitudes of customers towards off- and online travel agency services.

In the second part of my primary research, I examine the different types of sales methods of leisure travel suppliers, the online buying process – including payment- and its motivation, and expectations towards the Internet. Based on the results of my primary research, I define their field of adaptability and the possible directions of future research.

Closing my dissertation, I shortly summarize the theoretical chapters and the main results of my primary research.

The subject of my dissertation was defined by my over ten-year-experience in the tourism industry and higher education, and the close engagement in our modern, accelerated and information-hungry world. While ten years ago only tour operators and travel agencies had the information technology tools to make the bookings online, today customers can do it through the Internet without using any kind of the travel suppliers.

In my primary research, I approached the market of e-tourism from the point of view of leisure travel habits and the online marketing activities of travel agencies, in order to make an area, little reviewed by professional literature in Hungary, accessible to both present and future tourism professionals. As Hungarian professional literature is rather limited in my field of research, I hope that my results can contribute to reducing this blank area help future work of suppliers with useful information.

2. Relevance of research topic

Before beginning my research, goals were drawn up to outline the research.

The goal of my primary research is to examine the two dimensions – demand and supply – of the Hungarian tourism market from the point of view of the application of the Internet during leisure travel organization.

To be able to fulfill my goal, with the help of secondary and primary research I examined the impacts of information and communication technology tools on the system of tourism, the phenomenon of E-tourism in Hungary and in the world, the usage of the E-marketing tools in tourism, the differences between old and new customers through their attitudes, and the relations between the suppliers of the tourism industry and new technologies.

Although the application of the Internet is significant in the tourism industry, there are no relevant sources in Hungary that explore this area. This ensures the importance of my research.

The observation of the practical applications of e-tourism motivated me to set up my hypothesis. In recent years, the adaptation of the tools of electronic and information technology in the tourism industry encouraged both customers and suppliers to learn.

Therefore a new type of customer and a new type of supplier appeared on the market, and even the old type of customers – mainly elderly- were forced to learn novelties, such as buying e-tickets from airlines.

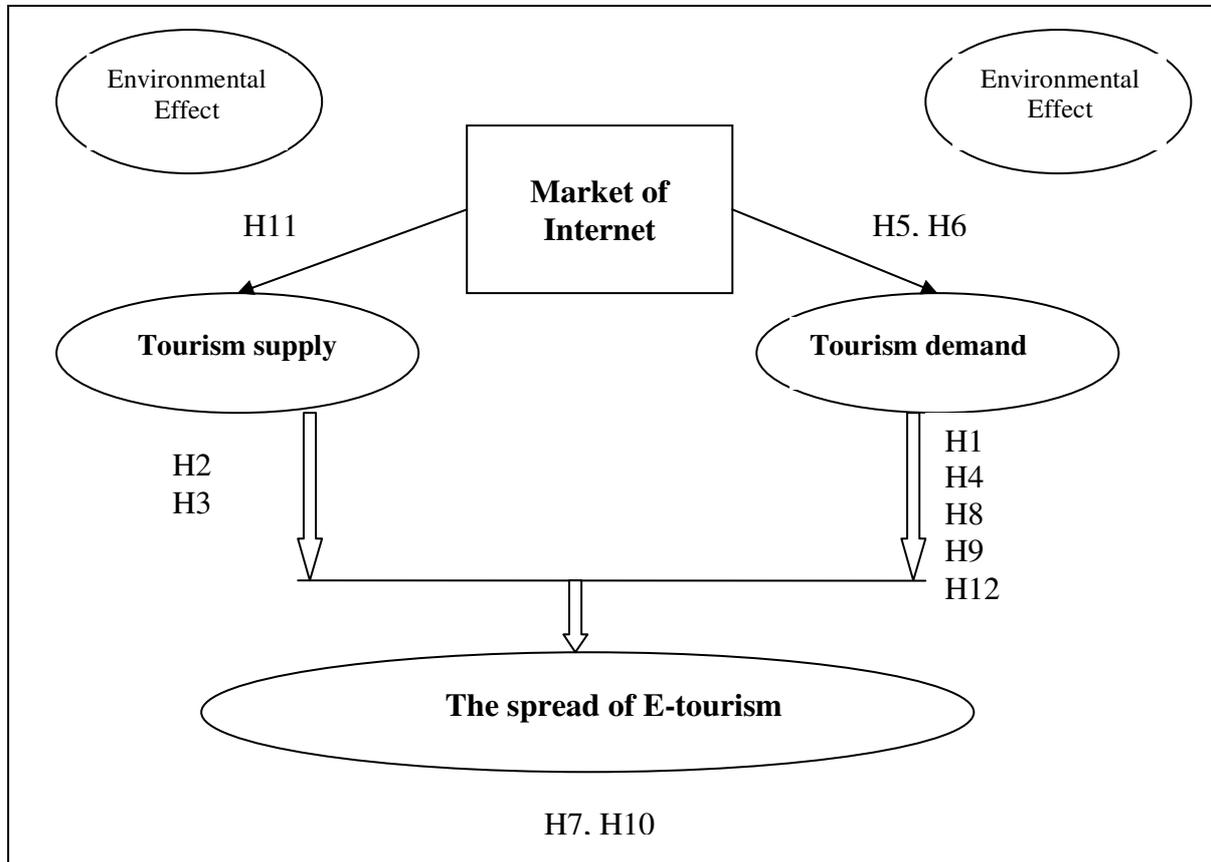
Offline tour operators and travel agencies also had to change their operation and had to figure out solutions in the frame of the new system, which helped them to survive and keep costumers.

The appearance of novelties had not only positive but negative impacts as well (breach of trust, for instance), so security became a key issue in electronic procedures.

3. Structure of hypotheses

I summarized the coherence between the impacts of the market of the Internet on demand and supply in the tourism industry and their consequences. (Diagram 1.)

Diagram 1. Structure of hypotheses



Source: Self-edited

Hypotheses on the impacts of Internet markets on tourism demand

More and more internet users realize the opportunities of the online world, which give not just the chance to collect information, but also to buy the products and services costumers want. At the same time this can also be dangerous.

H5: Customers over 35 have no confidence in booking and paying for travel services online.

H6: The segment of offline travel agencies is mainly customers over 35, while customers under 35 mainly use online travel agencies.

Hypotheses on the impacts of Internet markets on tourism supply

According to Chulwon (2004), the Internet provides the opportunity for tourism suppliers to give customers information about their services, to let the tourists make their orders and booking at relatively low prices.

H11: The interest toward the wellness travels among highly educated customers over 25 who use the internet to organize their travel is higher than among less educated persons.

Hypotheses concerning changes that occurred in tourism demand

Owing to the Internet, the previously long booking and payment procedures became shorter and customers became active participants in their own travel organization.

H1: With the growth of the security of online payment, the purchase of travel services will increase in direct proportion.
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H4: Travel agencies use internet Forums to measure real customer satisfaction.
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H8: For travel organization customers can use not only individual websites, but informational portals about destinations as well.

H9: Customers who book and pay for their travel services online are generally higher-educated.
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H12: Customers expect the websites of online travel agencies to be up-to-date, easy to use, reliable and secure.
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Hypotheses concerning changes that occurred in tourism supply

Information and communication technologies provide the opportunity for tourism suppliers to be able to effectively identify customers' needs and prepare tailor-made travel services for them.

H2: With the growth of the security of online payment and the decrease of supplier costs, the number of the travel agencies that launch the online payment option will increase in direct proportion.

H3: With the increase of the security of online payments, offline travel agencies launch online payment services, so that they can increase their target under 35-segment.

Hypotheses on the spread of E-tourism

'New' tourism is typically flexible, segmented and customized, as this tourism market realized that each tourist is different, so their needs and desires are different as well. Individually organized tours dominate above low-quality and cheap travel packages. Therefore flexibility became the key factor in travel organization.

H7: With the appearance of the online sales offline sales decline.

H10: The spread of internet applications in travel organization caused a decline in the profit and market share of traditional travel agencies.

4. Research methods

Before the beginning of my primary research I set up my goals of examination that my research was defined by.

After the review of secondary sources I realized that only a limited number of primary research was carried out in Hungary in my subject area. This motivated me to examine the two dimensions of the Hungarian tourism market – demand and supply - from the point of view of the application of the Internet during leisure travel organization. Because of the lack of Hungarian literature in my field of research, I do hope that my results can reduce this blank area and that I can help the future work of suppliers with some useful information.

My primary research is divided into two parts on both sides: demand and supply

Chart 1.

Chart 1. The structure of research

	Demand	Supply
Step 1	Quantitative questionnaire: Sample drawn from the concentrated tourism market: Travel Expo 2008-1000 persons	Quantitative questionnaire among tour operators and travel agencies: 100 suppliers
Step 2	Quantitative questionnaire: Sample drawn from Hungarian residents: 300 persons	Qualitative focus group interview with outstanding representatives of the association of Hungarian tourism suppliers

Source: Self-edited

On the demand side: I chose a quantitative research method, more specifically, a questionnaire survey on concentrated tourism- and Hungarian resident-market.

On the side of suppliers: among tour operators and travel agencies I chose a quantitative research method, more specifically, a questionnaire survey; while to outstanding representatives of the associations of Hungarian tourism suppliers I applied a qualitative method: a focus group interview. (See appendix for questionnaires.).

The structure of questionnaires

In my empirical research I focused on both dimensions of the tourism market: demand and supply.

During the second research step on the customers' side, my goal was to compare the results of the concentrated tourism- and the Hungarian residents' market. The results of the Hungarian residents' market were analyzed by multivariate statistics.

Therefore in the questionnaires of the exploratory research involving 1000 customers and 100 suppliers, the number of open-ended questions is higher. There are more scale type questions

in the questionnaire administered to Hungarian residents (300 inhabitants), making efforts to be representative.

Exploratory research questionnaires for customers and suppliers

The customer questionnaire includes six cascading parts in the area of leisure travel organization ranging from general information about the travel habits (like frequency of travel, motivation, types of travel organization) to specific Internet-related ones (like booking offline and online travel agencies' services online, searching for travel information on the Internet, and different types of online payment methods). Demographic figures (sex, age, level of education, location of residents) can be found at the end of the questionnaire.

The structure of the tour operators' and travel agents' questionnaire is similar to the customers'. It also starts from general information (profile and activities of the travel agents) to specific ones (methods of sales, online purchasing and payment methods, the significance of websites and forums in the operation of the suppliers, how they motivate online purchasing and how to measure customer satisfaction, the market shares of the suppliers, the expectations from the Internet, and the competition between companies) in eight topic areas.

The name, address, email address, telephone number and the name of each travel agency's representative can be found at the end of the questionnaire.

Focusing on the order of questions my priority was to start with general travel habits and continue with special needs and methods of travel organization, particularly the role of the Internet.

In the case of closed questions I applied the nominal level of measurement. I measured only those variables the attributes of which match the exclusion of completeness and correlation. (Babbie (1998)).

Because of the lack of previous primary research in my area, I applied more the open questions than closed ones. I also had to explore possible answers, because there were no pre-defined answers available yet that I could have used. Arising from the nature of open questions, 100 different kinds of answers emerged for certain types of questions. To be able to process data, I divided the answers into different code groups, and performed data cleansing. Encoding was a very important issue for the output of my research, therefore I did it on my own.

Hungarian residents' market questionnaire seeking representativity

The questions and the topics are the same here as in the questionnaire of exploratory research for customers. There are differences in the types of questions: 1.a., 6., 9.,11.,13.,15.,17., 20.a.b.c., 21 (See Appendix 4)

Because I wished to examine my test units separately from each other, I chose, within the different types of scales techniques, the non-comparative scale method, and within that the discrete evaluation type of scale. In most cases, I applied the 5-grade Likert scale. (Malhotra 2005)

Testing and proofing questionnaires

Before starting field work, I tested the questionnaires on those sophomore tourism students of Heller Farkas College of Tourism and Economics who became the interviewers.

My goal was to find and eliminate possible problems with the questionnaire and detect ambiguous or not clearly understandable issues.

Students who completed the consumer questionnaire made the following comments:

- One or more statements can be selected in the case of Questions 2, 4 and 10.
- In the case of Question 8 it was not clear whether I wanted to learn about up-to-date or weak websites the consumer use in general or specifically.
- Questions 1.b and 4 missed the 'other' category.

I validated and checked the reliability of the scale types of the questions in the questionnaire seeking representativity, before administering them to Hungarian residents.

Students who completed the consumer questionnaire made the following comments:

- In the case of Questions: 2, 3, and 7 one or more statements can be selected.
- In the case of Question 7.a, travel services should be listed in the order of popularity.

The emerged problems were corrected on the basis of the above feedback, and then again I consulted with the interviewers on the survey questions and structure.

Preparation (query) of interviewers

A thorough lack of knowledge questionnaires can have adverse effects on the examination. For example, it can result in embarrassing situations and a long lead time for questioning. Therefore, each student participating in the survey was asked to read out the survey questions and interpret them as well. Having thus 'rehearsed' administering questionnaires, no one reported any problems. Interviewers were instructed to read questionnaire questions verbatim as described, in order to successfully implement the research.¹

Afterwards I handed out the questionnaires to the students. In connection with the consumer questionnaire my request was to try to get a variety of age groups to respond.

Furthermore, I asked the interviewers to be very polite with consumers and appear to be well-groomed and clean (Babbie (1998)). The well-prepared interviewers asked their questions in person in the research field.

The interviewee range: customers and tour operators, travel agents

The place of the field research for the exploratory research questionnaire for 1000 customers and 100 suppliers was Travel Expo 2008 in Budapest. The Expo provided a great opportunity for the 65,000 visitors to oversee a wide range of travel services of offline and online travel agencies.

Random sampling was applied to consumers and judgment sampling (not random)² was applied to suppliers based on the list of exhibitors, tour operators and intermediaries.

The place of the field research for the questionnaire seeking representativity for the Hungarian resident market was one of Budapest's busiest transportation hubs, Örs Vezér Square. Sampling was based on the random method.

The outstanding representatives of the associations of Hungarian tourism suppliers (The Ministry of Local Governments and Regional Development: Tourism Unit (ÖTMTSZ)³., Association of Hungarian Tour Operators and Travel Agents(MUISZ)⁴, Hungarian National Tourist Office: E-marketing department (Magyar Turizmus ZRT)⁵, Hotel Association of

¹ Market Research Industry Sets Up Interviewing Quality Standards”, Management-Auckland 44(2) (March 1997): 12; „JDC Interviews Michael Redington”, Journal of Data Collection 25 =Spring 1985):2-6

² Naresh K. Malhotra (2002) Marketingkutató, KJK-KERSZÖV Jogi és Üzleti Kiadó Kft., Budapest

³ Tusor András a Főosztály vendéglátó szakértője

⁴ Molnár Gabriella a MUISZ vezetője

⁵ Végvári Attila e-marketing iroda vezető

Hungary (MSZSZ)⁶, The Hungarian Golden Keys Association (MSZAE)⁷. The interview took place at the office of the Association of Hungarian Tour Operators and Travel Agents in the Budapest Congress & World Trade Center) participated in the qualitative focus group interview.

Processing of collected data using SPSS

In order to analyze collected data, I chose a combination of a descriptive and a causal research method, and I was looking for correlations.

To do this, two-or multi-variable analysis methods were used.

Based on Sajtos-Mitev's (2007) opinion, this method was used because the cross-analysis examined the changing relationship between two or more variables, and show their combination frequency distribution.

With the help of SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. both the consumer and the provider questionnaires examined the significant differences and variables in the crosstab. In the leisure-travel consumer groups, the Pearson Chi-square (chi-square) test was performed, as I wished to measure the statistical significance of correlations of in the Cross-correlations.

⁶ Kovács István Főtitkár

⁷ Gunst András Alapító és Elnök

5. Results

Based on my primary research results, my hypotheses were either accepted or rejected. The resulting theses are as follows (Chart 2):

Chart 2: Research results

Hypotheses on the impacts of Internet markets on tourism demand	Results	Thesis
H5: Customers over 35 have no confidence in booking and paying for travel services online.	Partially accepted	T5: Within the over 35 group, there is a difference between the 36-50 and the over 51 groups. While those over 51 clearly distrust online travel organization, the same is only partially true for the 36-50 year-olds.
H6: The segment of offline travel agencies is mainly customers over 35, while customers under 35 mainly use online travel agencies.	Accepted	T6: The segment of offline travel agencies is mainly customers over 35, while customers under 35 mainly use online travel agencies.
Hypotheses on the impacts of Internet markets on tourism supply	Results	Thesis
H11: The interest toward the wellness travels among highly educated customers over 25 who use the internet to organize their travel is higher than among less educated persons.	Accepted	T11: The interest toward the wellness travels among highly educated customers over 25 who use the internet to organize their travel is higher than among less educated persons.

Hypotheses concerning changes that occurred in tourism demand	Results	Thesis
H1: With the growth of the security of online payment, the purchase of travel services will increase in direct proportion.	Rejected	T1: Consumers who have been booking and paying for leisure travel online will continue doing so in the future. The lack of trust, as a risk factor does not appear significantly in the survey conducted among the general Hungarian population.
H4: Travel agencies use internet Forums to measure real customer satisfaction.	Partially accepted	T4: In terms of customer satisfaction: a large number of service providers measure it by various means (questionnaires, passenger follow-up by phone or in person at the office), and very few of them use the forum.
H8: For travel organization customers can use not only individual websites, but informational portals about destinations as well.	Accepted	T8: For travel organization customers can use not only individual websites, but informational portals about destinations as well. (which is significant on the sights, programmes, and restaurants).
H9: Customers who book and pay for their travel services online are generally higher-educated.	Accepted	T9: Customers who book and pay for their travel services online are generally higher-educated.
H12: Customers expect the websites of online travel agencies to be up-to-date, easy to use, reliable and secure.	Accepted	T12: In the case of an ideal online travel agency it is a basic requirement to have a website that is easy to use, reliable and secure as well as to have low prices.

Hypotheses concerning changes that occurred in tourism supply	Results	Thesis
<p>H2: With the growth of the security of online payment and the decrease of supplier costs, the number of the travel agencies that launch the online payment option will increase in direct proportion.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>T2: Owing to an agreement between the Association of Hungarian Tour Operators and Travel Agents and Hungarian banks, a growing number of travel agencies will accept credit cards, as the banks reduced their commission from 2% to 1.3% specifically for travel agencies. Consequently, the number of credit card payments will certainly increase within 4-5 years.</p>
<p>H3: With the increase of the security of online payments, offline travel agencies launch online payment services, so that they can increase their target under 35-segment.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>T3: In the light of the results of the examination of hypothesis H2, it can be established that an increasing number of offline offices will introduce online payment, but this is only marginally due to the proliferation of online payment security. The first part of the hypothesis was rejected. Concerning the second part, however, it can be observed that the below 35 age group plans using online travel services in the future.</p>

Hypotheses on the spread of E-tourism	Results	Thesis
H7: With the appearance of the online sales offline sales decline.	Rejected	<p>T7: Despite the fact that all service providers have their own Web sites, many of them do not know, you have not even be checked web page visit statistics and most of them are unaware of the proportion of travel services booked on the Internet. Másfelől a fogyasztók számára - különösen az idősebb korosztály tekintetében- utazásaik megszervezésénél az egyik legfontosabb tényező a személyes kapcsolat.</p> <p>On the other hand, the most important factor in travel organization for consumers - especially the elderly - is a personal relationship.</p>
H10: The spread of internet applications in travel organization caused a decline in the profit and market share of traditional travel agencies.	Partially accepted	<p>T10: On one hand travel service providers see the Internet as a new sales and advertizing channel, while on the other hand they also feel threatened by it. Traditional service providers feel that tin order to keep their market position and customers, they need to compete primarily by using their professional competence, a high-quality fund for commodities and services, fast administration and the maintenance of good personal relations.</p>

Source: Self-edited

6. Applicability of research result, recommendations

My primary research results at both the theoretical and the practical level fill the gap in professional literature on the subject found in Hungary.

Previously published research highlighted consumer travel habits, and within this, relationship of the virtual network and the customer played a very insignificant role. Those publications mainly focused on the role of the Internet in finding travel information, While other research projects examined Internet-usage habits of Hungarians and using tourism services was just one category among other products bought online, and other studies evaluated only a narrow range of online service providers and their activities. My empirical

research examines both sides of the tourism market: the demand and supply side to explore the topic of online leisure travel organization.

My studies will help readers understand consumer behavior and the supply side of E-tourism, as it provides more insight into the tourism industry, information and communication technology tools, especially into the changes brought about by the introduction of the Internet.

In practical terms, the results of my empirical research provide new information primarily to tourism service providers, including tour operators and travel agents, thus contributing to their effective operation in the future. Accordingly, the following observations and recommendations can be made:

- The survey revealed that although more than 90% of consumers use the Internet to access travel information, and almost all tour operators and travel agents have their own websites, most operators do not know their own information seeking online visitors or customers.
- This means that neither tour operators nor travel agents have proper information about their own online activities or about their target market.
- In order to avoid this, service providers can be advised to inquire about their own website statistics, so that they can easily conduct surveys on, for example, who and from where (e.g. search engines, Destination website) visited the site, when (e.g. which month, year, etc.), how many of them used basic (e.g. accommodation, programs, etc.) or supplementary (e.g. insurance) tourism services.
- In addition, using the results of their web statistics, tour operators can find out which menu items on their website are most interesting for visiting consumers, thus the most 'clicked' items can be positioned in the most prominent places on the website. By using web analytics, a more developed system of web statistics – terms sometimes used interchangeably –in addition to various reports and figures, agencies can receive such tailor-made solutions that allow the individual analysis of the relationships between figures. This does not only allow tourism service providers to establish which ones are their most popular 'products', but they can also see, which service to offer to what age group.
- Research results also showed that while the vast majority of consumers see the need to read other people's opinions on forums before they travel, only a few travel agencies have their own website forums. Other service providers feel that they are not

interested in creating such an online service. I would recommend launching forums to larger tour operators that are also intermediaries. By introducing a web site forum, travel agencies and also regularly read posts and comments and they can immediately respond to emerging issues and problems. In this manner, they can establish a regular interactive contact with passengers, who can immediately react to changing needs. Through an interactive relationship between tourists and tour operator, a forum can create trust, with the result that the agency can establish its range of regular online customers.

- Tourism service providers are divided on the appearance and use of the Internet in their business. Many travel agents still think that this new tool made it difficult to operate, but nevertheless they feel 'safe', because research also showed that travelers still prefer traditional travel agencies to online travel agencies, due to the importance of personal contacts. Despite the above results, traditional travel agencies are advised to invest in information and communication technology infrastructure, which make the shift possible in the case of a change in consumer preferences, and demand increases towards online agencies, because demand continuously increases for up-to-date information and quick and convenient administration.

In order to make the above suggestions feasible, travel agencies should change their attitudes towards the online world, pay attention to the development of new technologies, and learn about and launch new online services step-by-step to be able to maintain their market position and enlarge their clientele.

7. Future research directions

In my dissertation, I examined the relationship between consumers, tour operators and travel agencies within a given year at the the level of using online tools for organizing leisure tours. In my present work I introduced an initial assessment of the situation, as there was no primary research in my subject, along which a longitudinal study could have been done. This was officially confirmed by the Hungarian National Tourist Office.

I assume that information and communication technology tools undergo further and further developments in the future, which will influence stakeholders in the tourism market. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to periodically perform research, looking at changes in consumer demand.

Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to follow different consumer groups and the degree of changes in their age-groups and their level of education 'transformations'. For instance, those from the 14-18 and 19-25 age groups could be examined who are open to novelties such as ordering online, trying new online travel agency services.

The method of trend watch could be used in the study of the changing relation between tourism suppliers and 'new' devices. Focusing on tour operators and travel agencies, in the future it would be worth examining the relations between the profiles and segments of travel agencies and the level of use of online tools, not just in the case of tour operators and travel agents dealing with incoming, outgoing or domestic categories, but also in the case of agencies specializing in holidays, cultural tourism (tours, city breaks), sport tourism (eg.: skiing), wellness and health tourism.

As a result, the segment-specific recommendations could be made to travel agencies for the use of appropriate information and communication tools.

For a young segment, more online novelties (eg.: games, blogs, etc.), for an older one a step-by-step audio-visual guide to basic online transactions (eg.: booking, payment, etc.) to facilitate their use.

For example, in Hungary there has been such an initiative in the case of a travel agency, whose segment is mainly the younger, 'backpacker' generation.

Németh (2006) An interactive travel agency was opened by Baraka, a 10-year-old offline tour operator in Miskolc. The core of this program is "the operation of a complex travel agency application system which is linked to the website of the company and is handled as one unit". The office has reduced previously increased administrative duties by developing an own web-based software program. The agency provides all passengers an "own site" opportunity after a single time registration. Passengers get confirmation text messages and emails after booking, about deposit deadlines, and cancellation consequences. The travel agency can monitor each step of customers without any personal contact. Furthermore, the travel agency can communicate with guides through an internal "bulletin board". It is apparent that this system facilitates internal communication, customer relations, and reduces the operating costs of the office.⁸

If there were an annual survey carried out, it would also be possible follow if the offices which declared that they would introduce online payment by credit card or a website

⁸ Németh Andrea: Interaktív iroda, Turizmus Panoráma 2006.Szeptember

forum, really took this step, and that as a consequence, what kind of positive or negative experiences were gained.

With my empirical research, I do not intend to consider my topic closed, because I realize the great importance of providing up-to-date touristic information to both the profession and my students.

8. Summary

Tourism is inevitably one of the most visible and fastest-growing economic sectors, which comprises more than 9% of the world's GDP, and provides employment to a total of 220 million people, according to a WTTC survey.⁹ Due to the rapid development of information technology, the tourism sector has changed and the appearance of the Internet set a new trend to tourism service providers and consumers.

In my dissertation I undertook to fill a blank area in Hungarian professional literature on e-tourism, and use my primary research to verify changes that occurred in the organization of leisure tours and trips with the introduction of information and communication technologies.

My primary research did not only examine changes on the consumer side, but also on the service-provider - tour operators, travel agencies – side, brought about by the appearance and application of new information and communication tools in stakeholders on the tourism market. Before starting my research, I approached changes triggered by the electronic revolution by reviewing international and domestic professional literature at three levels: the system of tourism, marketing and from the point of view of consumers and service providers.

It is true for every sector of industry that environmental (natural, social, political, economic, technical) changes have a profound impact on the functioning of companies in a given market. This is especially true in a more information-intensive, sensitive and dynamic industry like tourism.

To understand the relationship between tourism and its environment, past changes must be explored. That is why I considered it extremely important to present the system of tourism through the historical overview of the appearance of tourism, the local development of tourism, and the evolution of definition of tourism in Hungary. The second and third theoretical chapters of my dissertation deal with the demand and supply sides of the tourist market in detail. In this present part, I explore the general relations of the tourism system

⁹ Tourism impact data and forecast: http://www.wttc.org/eng/Tourism_Research/Tourism_Economic_Research

(Lengyel, 2004), highlighting changes developed in one of the most important elements of the market, which is marketing.

The establishment of the 'new' tourism market both internationally and in Hungary can be explained primarily by the spread of Internet use and the continuous increase in the number of users. Instantly recognizing the benefits of information and communication technology, IT companies, such as operators of GDS systems (Amadeus, Sabre, Worldspan), developed such new software programs for tour operators that enabled service providers to deliver their services directly to customers through their Internet. This was the beginning of the sales of a new form of 'impersonal' or online sales, which called for new businesses such as low-cost airlines and online, travel agencies. For instance, Expedia used Amadeus, Travelocity used Sabre and Orbitz used Worldspan as their GDS programs (WTO 2008). The use of the Internet in business has fundamentally transformed the elements of traditional marketing tools, which led to the creation of e-marketing.

Afterwards, I examined the role of e-marketing in tourism using an interactive marketing mix - online products, online prices, online promotion, online sales channels (Eszes- Bányai (2002)- which was supplemented by three further elements of tourism marketing services (the human factor, physical elements and process), and in this manner I built the Internet-based model of service marketing. The model introduces innovations on the demand and supply sides of the market. In this vein, the second theoretical chapter of my dissertation dealt with changes in demand i.e. the consumer side of e-tourism.

In order to understand new customer behavior, I reviewed professional literature presenting general shopping habits and factors influencing purchases. Different socio-cultural (e.g., family, reference groups, lifestyle, personal influence) and psychological (e.g., perception, learning, motivation, personality, attitudes) factors play a major role in the decision making of consumers when it comes to purchasing. As a result, understanding consumers is not a simple task. Companies should have the same consumer needs in mind to attempt to segment the market. Different consumer segments can be created using knowledge (e.g., geographic, demographic, psychographic, etc), and as the number of criteria is infinite, the number of consumer groupings also be done in many different ways.

My dissertation continues along the dimension of consumer behavior, with the examination of tourist consumer behavior. First of all I defined what a leisure traveler, a tourist is. The definition of a tourist evolved parallel with the development of the notion of tourism in professional literature (Norwal 1936, ENSZ 1963, 1968, WTO 1995).

The purpose of a tourist's travel can be extremely diverse (a holiday, visiting friends and family, health, culture, leisure, gastronomy, sports, etc.). Travel-related decisions are affected by their needs and demands. Similarly to other sectors, tourism service providers segment consumers in order to understand the needs of tourists. Overall, it is not easy to sort tourists into defined groups, because in many cases it is difficult to clearly define travel motives, as - consciously or unconsciously - they may start their journeys but for various reasons on the same occasion. The starting point for typologies is derived from needs, their motivations and resulting demands. Several researchers dealt with tourist typologies (Cohen (1972, 1974), Plog (1972), Smith (1989)), but it is not advisable to forget about the fact that there are limits to the use of typologies. One of the greatest drawbacks of these groupings is that they might not take the impact of such developments in information and communication technologies into account, as the Internet. It is thus concluded that these segmentation methods are outdated. Therefore, I continued my dissertation with discussing the e-consumer, the new type of customer brought about by the introduction of the Internet.

The group of Internet users is not homogeneous either, consequently, both traditional travel agencies having websites, and exclusively online service providers need to develop a special business strategy in order to reach the relevant target groups. With the development of the Information Society, a major dividing line was established, separating the traditional and the 'new' consumer (Lewis-Bridger (2000), Barz (2001), Töröcsik (2006)). The main difference between these two groups is time, i.e. the lack of time, challenges people day-by-day. Therefore, quickly and easily accessible information bears a special value to the 'new' consumer, more specifically, the well-informed constitute an outstanding value.

In the third theoretical chapter of my dissertation, I dealt with tourism supply, more specifically with service-providers. As the tourism market is part of the service sector, I first scrutinized the concept of the service market.

Next, in this section I introduced various groupings of tourism companies, and then moved over to the service providers who specifically specialize in tourism, such as transport companies (air, rail, ship companies) commercial accommodation providers of different standards (hotels, motels, campsites, hostels, etc), catering establishments (restaurants, pastry shops, liquor stores, bars), with special attention to the activities of tour operators and travel agents that bear the most importance in my primary research, from all tourism services groups.

The above-mentioned traditional tourism service-providers were forced to re-consider their operation due to the explosion of electronic technologies in the tourism market. The

spread of the Internet and related extension of network connections revolutionized the tourism industry and considerably changed business procedures at many companies. Those tourism operators who are willing to open and get to know information communication technology tools (Internet, extranet and intranet), and through these the development opportunities, will also be able to develop such products and services that make it suitable for them to preserve their market positions.

In my empirical research I focused on two parts of tourism market: on the one hand I mapped the demand, or consumer side, and on the other hand the supply, or service-provider side, in order to assess the extent of internet use in organizing leisure trips. As the topic has not yet been explored by many, open questions got a higher weight and occurred more frequently than closed questions.

In order to analyze collected data, I chose a blend of descriptive and causal research methods, seeking correlations. For this, bi-or multi-variable analysis, the crosstab method was used. With the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), I examined significant differences and crosstab variables in the case of both the consumer and the service-provider questionnaires. In the case of tour consumer groups, I performed the Pearson Chi - square (χ^2 , chi-square), as I wished to measure the statistical significance of correlations observed in the cross tabs.

In the light of the results of my empirical research, I could accept six, partially accept four, and reject two of my 12-part hypothesis set. The results of my primary research fill the gap in scientific literature found in Hungary. While in theory it helps to understand consumer and service-provider behavior changes in the tourism industry caused by the application of information and communication technology tools, from a practical point of view, it provides new information to tour operators and travel agents.

The results obtained suggest, inter alia, that although more than 90% of consumers use the Internet to access travel information, most operators do not know about their online visitors either searching for information or purchasing products or services, despite the fact that almost all tour operators and travel agents have their own websites.

The results of my primary research also show that while consumers feel the need to read other people's opinion, rather than just read travel agency brochures before they travel, very few travel agencies have their own forum.

The surveyed service providers are divided on the appearance and use of Internet in their businesses. Many feel 'safe', just like my research showed that passengers still prefer

traditional travel agents to online travel agencies, because personal relationships are important to them.

My research project is not completed with the work presented, as my research curiosity and commitment to the profession will give me an incentive in the future to continue examining the impact of the emergence of new online technologies on the tourism market, so that I can provide information of practical use to both the profession and college students as well.

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