

Websites of Majorca Hotels: An Evaluation

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RESUMO

Após a utilização da Internet para fins comerciais, a indústria turística mudou a sua estrutura. Intermediários estão perdendo espaço e hotéis estão contatando os clientes diretamente. Na Ilha de Mallorca, Espanha, um dos principais destinos turísticos internacionais, gerenciar os *websites* dos hotéis se tornou função essencial com essas mudanças. Este artigo objetiva medir a presença na Internet e o nível de desenvolvimento dos *sites* de Internet dessa região. Para esse propósito, 284 hotéis foram analisados e o nível de desenvolvimento de seus *sites* verificados por meio de um instrumento construído com base na literatura relativa ao tema. Os resultados sugerem que os *sites* ainda traduzem o conceito de mídia de massa, na medida em que a interatividade e os processos internos necessários para manter o *site* “vivo” necessitam ser revistos.

Palavras-chave: Marketing Internet; Indústria hoteleira; Turismo; *Website*.

ABSTRACT

After the commercial use of the Internet, the tourism industry has changed its structure. Intermediaries are losing space and hotels are beginning to contact costumers directly. At the island of Majorca, one of the main international tourist destinies, managing hotels' websites is a crucial role in these changes. This paper aims to measure the Internet presence and development level of the hotels' websites of this region. To that purpose, the website existence of 284 hotels was verified. The websites that were found had their development level analyzed with a measurement instrument constructed based on a qualitative analysis of the literature presented here. Results suggest that hotel's websites are still translating the mass media concept, as its interactivity and the internal processes necessary to keep the website “alive” still demanded some review.

Keywords: internet marketing; hotel industry; tourism; website.

INTRODUCTION

In the history of marketing, there has been no such a revolutionary communication media as the Internet. From the need of buying to loyalty management, Internet has changed, and is still changing, the traditional marketing practices. Even if the Internet user doesn't introduce any kind of information on the site, programs installed in Internet servers can “observe” where he clicks and extract important data that subsidies price formulation, product design and distribution chains. On the other hand, consumers have also benefited from those changes. They are now able to, for example, using the interactivity made possible by the new media and available by suppliers, publish what they think about the products they bought and see what others recommend. This not only makes more information available about products and services, but also better ones. Consumers now make superior decisions on buying products resulting in enhanced satisfaction.

Internet however, is not the best media for all products. Some kind of products can make more of it than others do. Chaffey *et al.* (2000) suggest some product characteristics that can benefit most from the new media and that are adherent to the tourism industry:

(a) the ones whose clients have Internet access: tourists have education levels and social position which favors Internet access;

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(b) the value proposition to the client is better using the Internet: the hotel room negotiated directly with the client can deliver a more personalized treatment at a better price than those negotiated through travel agencies or tour operators;

(c) the product can be delivered using the electronic media: tourist services, before being negotiated, are nothing more to the client than information, proper for electronic distribution;

(d) the product can be standardized: the high levels of demand makes the supply of tourist services information approaching standardization.

In this scenario, Spain is one of the main tourist destinations in the world, with 49.5 million tourist arrivals during 2001, generating an income of US\$ 32.9 billion, according to the World Tourist Organization - WTO (2002). Among Spain's Autonomous Communities, the Balearic Islands is the one which concentrates the major tourist visitation index: 47.5 million overnights in 2002, or 21.3% of Spain's overnights, according to the National Institute of Statistics - INE (2003). This makes the Balearic Islands, being Majorca the larger one, one of the key international tourist poles.

Better hotel websites help improve customer satisfaction and hotels profits. With enhanced interaction, tourists have more options regarding direct contact with hotels, leading to more flexibility when planning their vacations. When a hotel sells lodging packages to tour operators, it does not know what type of client will be hosted or what this client likes or expects. On the other hand, when sold directly, hotels could offer more personalized services to clients because they know each client individually, and consequently what his or her service preferences and peculiarities are. With better-developed infrastructures, hotels direct reservation services tend to be more efficient and secure, gaining customers that are more trustful.

As Internet is an appropriate media for tourist services distribution, the question raised

here is: in a developed tourist destination such as Majorca, how are hotels websites? How much presence do hotels have on the Internet and how are they exploring the new media? The present paper addresses such questions, aiming to evaluate the presence and development level of Majorca Hotels' websites. This is relatively new, not much explored theme, which makes this research rather exploratory. As no tested quantitative measurement instrument for evaluating hotel websites was found, a qualitative analysis of the literature was proposed, in order to construct such an instrument. The instrument was applied in 284 Majorca's hotels websites and the results are presented here. At the end, some final comments are exposed.

1. INTERNET EVOLUTION

There is no doubt the Internet has grown at an impressive rhythm, and one can say for sure it is the fastest emergent communication media ever. The magnitude of the data, however imprecise, regarding this development, is remarkable. For example, radio took 38 years to reach 50 million people. Latter, television needed only 13 years to arrive at the same public size. The Internet, on the other hand, achieved it in just 5 years (Bell and Tang, 1998). After reaching this public in 1996, Internet arrived to 627 million users 6 years latter, according to GlobalReach (2002). The Internet Software Consortium - ISC, that publishes the number of Internet hosts since 1981, indicates that they were as much as 213 in that year, and in 2003 they have grown to 171 million (ISC, 2003).

In the countries where the majority tourists of Majorca proceed from (Germany, United Kingdom and Spain), Internet penetration in 2002 was 39%, 57% and 20%, respectively (CyberAtlas, 2003). This degree of penetration is relatively high, when compared to Brazil, which was 8%, and United States, the country where Internet is most developed, with 59%. One of the main causes for this high penetration is the commercial exploration of Internet, created initially for academic and military purposes. In 1997, Spaniards spent 0.48 million Euros online. Four years latter this amount rouses to 525.12 million Euros. With more secure payment methods, the fear of making transactions online

has dropped among the reasons for not buying. In 2001, 25.5% of online Spanish consumers cited insecurity as the main reasons for not buying online, compared to 18.6% who cited it in the next year (AECE, 2002 and 2003).

2. INTERNET MARKETING

With few entry barriers, Internet-based business has multiplied all around, in spite of the risks involved. According to Rayman-Bacchus and Molina (2001):

In the last five years, we have witnessed centuries old business formulae for success being overturned by those willing and able to exploit the communication possibilities of the Internet and the information storage capacity of the World Wide Web.

The marketing discipline has been exploring the Internet according to its penetration in the homes of the consumers. Chaffey *et al.* (2000) suggest that the new media can be integrated to the modern marketing concept, since: (a) it can be used in entire extent of organizational functions that deliver products to clients and other stakeholders; (b) it is a powerful communication media that integrates the company internally; (c) it facilitates the management of information; and (d) it has a significant impact in the future of business. The authors define Internet Marketing as “the application of Internet and related digital technology to achieve the objectives of marketing” (Chaffey *et al.*, 2000).

Hoffman and Novak (1997) appointed the differences between the marketing using traditional media and Internet marketing. The first factor stated is the interactivity enabled by the new media. Using the Internet, it is possible that consumers interact with the media and with one another; organizations supply content to the media and to one another; organizations and consumers interact; and, consumers supply commerce-oriented content to the media, that is, content with which companies can improve their products and services, aligning their characteristics with customer's needs. Some examples of the new possibilities enabled by interactivity are product design with participation of the clients, improvement of actual products and services according to the wish of

clients, development of site content with the information required by costumers and interactive support to products.

The second factor cited by the authors is “flow”. As a connection between the user and the media, flow makes the user feels comfortable, absorbed and self-constructing. The third factor references the kind of behavior the user can adopt while navigating in the Internet, which can be: (a) experimental or (b) objective oriented. When the user is not yet experienced in navigating through the virtual world, his behavior is said to be experimental and is related to an intrinsically motivated exploratory search. When he is already used to it, he goes straightforward to the information he wants, and his behavior is defined as extrinsically motivated. Internet sites, depending on their target public, have to be prepared for both behaviors: comfortable at first glance for inexperienced users, and straightforward for the experienced ones.

Robinette, Brand and Lenz (2001), using a quite enthusiastic approach, suggest that the paradigm of an Internet site viewed as an electronic catalog that receives some clicks must be abandoned. In spite of the nonexistent out-of-the-shelf solution to add emotion to consumer experiences in Internet, one of the starting points must be taking conscience of the reasons that lead the costumers to visit the site.

With available directions about how to construct a good website, however, few companies adopt practices that fully explore its potential. Wood (2001) indicates that researches in this area appoint the use of Internet as promotion, sales and distribution tool, without exploring it as an important source of marketing information. These deficiencies, that can be overcome by obtaining and processing information provided by consumer access to the site, characterizes a weak use of the intelligence embedded in the media.

3. INTERNET IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The tourism market is an adherent scenario for developing virtual companies connected

by information technology. In Spain, data available at AECE (2002 and 2003) indicates the adoption of tourism services using the Internet has grown each year. Among the products commercialized in the virtual market, hotel reservations has grown from 8.7% in 2001 to 17.8% the next year, occupying the 6th position among the products and services more frequently traded.

As Yelkur and Dacosta (2001) states that, as hotels' transactions do not need physical delivery of the product, the frequency of purchase is relatively low and the cost relatively high, Internet is a more efficient medium for conducting business. Their opinion has been shared by others, such as Palmer and McCole (2000) and Doolin, Burgess and Cooper (2002).

This development has an inner-industry determinant factor. Generally stated, the tourism industry has a group of sectors that interrelate or complement according to the situation. Serra (2002) cites the components of the tourism industry as being: lodging, transportation, travel distributors and organizers, tourist destinations and tourist attractions. The distribution channel, which is part of the travel distributors and organizers sector, has the primary function of approximating the costumers to the other sectors. For many years, consumer access to the tourism products and services was done solely by these intermediaries, because of consumer's lack of knowledge and access facility, high search costs and unfavorable geographic position. As the Internet stepped up the stage in the 90's, tourism industry faced drastic changes. The consumer had then direct access to the tourist products and services, bypassing intermediaries and crafting his own vacations (Rayman-Bacchus and Molina, 2001; Yelkur and Dacosta, 2001; Serra, 2002; Wynne *et al*, 2001).

An investigation made by Reinders and Baker (1998) with 31 managers of tourist companies analyses the five competitive forces proposed earlier by Porter (1980) in relation to the introduction of Internet in the tourism agencies industry, which is part of the travel distributors and organizers sector. The results regarding each of the competitive forces were:

(a) entrance barriers: with the reduction of intermediary infrastructures and relatively lower costs of Internet exposition, entrance barriers tend to minimize with time;

(b) bargaining power of consumers: with more information available about prices and destinations, consumers will have more bargaining power and will be the most benefited from this process;

(c) bargaining power of suppliers: dealing directly with costumers, suppliers will enhance their bargaining power toward intermediaries;

(d) substitute products: virtual tourism agencies, the potential substitute for real world agencies, did not gain much attention from the interviewees;

(e) internal competition: the combination of abilities and financial capacity can boost the big companies at the beginning, but as the cost of technology access lowers with time, the small ones will follow.

While the industry is remodeling itself, hotels are each time more in direct contact with their clients, using Internet glue. Information technology is gaining its space in strategic planning not only to promote transactions, but to promote long run loyalty. The main tool, the interface with the client, is the website. Its importance is showed by the relatively large numbers of studies devoted to the matter.

4. HOTEL'S WEBSITES

The objective of this section is to briefly describe researches concerning the evaluation of Internet sites of hotels, collecting relevant items that are adherent to the objective of the present work.

Doolin, Burgess and Cooper (2002) used an adapted metric of their previous creation, the Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA) to measure the level of development of 26 hotel Internet sites in New Zealand. This metric adopts three stages of development: promotion, which is about hotel information; provision, which constitutes the level of interactivity; and processing, or the possibility of transacting online. Interactivity was divided in low, medium and high level. The low degree of interactivity was defined when the hotel site

had a basic product catalog, links for additional information and a form ask online questions; medium interactivity was attributed when it had a complete product catalog, frequent asked questions, site map and specific information about the tourism industry; and high interactivity when it had a chat room, discussion forums and e-mail newsletters. Their work concluded that most hotels, or 92.4% of them, had their sites in the provision stage, being 30.8% classified as having low interactivity, 46.2% as having medium interactivity and 15.4% classified with high interactivity.

In a broader analysis context, viewing Internet sites as a strategic marketing tool, Rayman-Bacchus and Molina (2001) analyzed 50 Internet sites among travel agencies, system reservation providers and specialized services like car rental agencies. Their objective was to identify the leading sites, characterized by the following references: facilitate interactivity, publish the number of visits, act as business nodes, inherit technology from other service providers, innovate in service, generate profit and present the site in a pleasant way. As a result, a tendency to tourist chain integration was found, through the construction of business alliances, links to public agencies and a variety of uses in room reservation technology.

Fransi (2001) wrote a doctoral thesis with the objective of analyzing the relations between quality and profit generation in the virtual firm management, from the perspective of perceived quality. His investigation included, among other specific industry sites, portals in the tourist industry. The methodology involved gathering information from users concerning their perception of quality, buying intentions and satisfaction with Internet services, and comparing the expectations of the ideal commercial site with the ones they used the most. Among the conclusions, the author observes the high implications of experience and perceived quality services to buying intentions and satisfaction of consumers.

In the Scottish tourism context, Cano and Prentice (1998) investigated what they called Internet “endearment”. According to

the authors, endearment is a concept involving a feeling of affectively being part of the tourism business through the Internet site. It is a mixture of internal meanings and external symbolism, which should take more than satisfy the user in his navigation experience, implying his immersion in the local value system. The approach used by the authors is about virtual tourism visitation, minimizing the restrictions of electronic communication by making the use of online conversation tools, maps, indexes and online help. After investigating 983 sites in Scotland, they concluded that the communicative style and other qualities relative to the construction of a relationship with the user were not dominant.

Bell and Tang (1998) evaluated 60 Internet sites from six different industries, with tourism among them, aiming the establishment of how companies are using the Internet to conduct their business in a daily basis. Their measurement instrument included the following dimensions: site access, content, graphics, structure, ease of use, navigation, usefulness, differentiation characteristics, possibility of online transaction and the presence of an access fee. Their conclusion appoints a mature capacity to publish an Internet site and some concern about content. However, few companies were improving their sites with unique features, having few differences among competitors. Just 30% had online transactions available, which shows, according to the authors, a tendency.

Objecting the evaluation of hotels and tour operators websites in Taiwan, Wan (2002) used three analytic categories: (a) user interface, which included ease of access, use of specific information search, standardization, ease of access to information from multiple ways and online help; (b) information variety, including simplicity, up-to-date, relevant information with enough content coverage; and (c) the presence of a reservation system. His sample was composed of 60 international hotel sites and 78 tour operator sites. The interfaces were considered “good” for both hotels and tour operators and the variety of information was considered “reasonable”. The main difference between the two groups of companies

was in the presence of a room reservation system: for the author's surprise, more hotels had that feature in their Internet sites than did tour operators.

Gilbert, Powell-Perry and Widijoso (1999) state that Internet technology is very appropriate for a customer relationship strategy. The most difficult function for most industries is customer identification, which in the case of hotels is facilitated by its natural acceptance by the clients. With the double objective of investigating Internet sites as a marketing communication tool and the identification of managerial attitudes towards the adoption of the Web as a customer relationship tool, the authors used eight analysis categories: information, room reservation, loyalty programs, public relations, added-value services, employee relationship, channel member space and personalized search. The conclusion appointed a minority of hotels using the Web as a relationship marketing tool and many of them are in the stage of inform to construct the knowledge about consumers. The potential of the Internet to develop a relationship marketing strategy was explored mostly by the big hotel chains, which are leading this technology.

According to the previously exposed studies, regarding measurement instruments for hotel websites, there is no standard reference to be a guide in the subject, as well as no tested instrument. Each research created its own tool and used it according to the objectives proposed by the respective authors. However, it is possible to extract measurement items relevant to the present study and from that point create an instrument that fits the objectives here proposed.

5. METHOD

The method used in this research proposes the creation of a quantitative measurement instrument based on a qualitative analysis of the literature and the application of this instrument in the websites of Majorca's hotels. From the literature cited previously, the dimensions and variables of analysis collected to construct the instrument used in this study, are: information (contact information, services available, local tourism attraction and language), navigability

(link to home-page, menu, sitemap, download time, location indication and search facility), aesthetics (standardized pages, pleasant colors, adequate use of space, font sizes), interactivity (newsletters, chat room, other clients contact and FAQ), online reservation (mechanism, answer time), privacy and security (policies) and differentials.

As for the scale used, most of the variables were valued using a dichotomy variable stating that the referenced feature is either "not present" or "present", valued respectively "0" or "1". Promotions and events, services available in hotel and rooms, local tourist attractions, language available and reserve request method used a 3-point Lickert scale, valued "0", "0.5" or "1", respectively. Reservation answer time was measured using a 5-point scale valued "0", "0.25", "0.5", "0.75" or "1". Finally, differentials was rated with a 10-point scale ranging from "0" to "1", with "0.1" intervals. The variables' average points were attributed to the dimensions and the dimensions' average points were attributed to the construct "website development level".

The demographic variables collected were: hotel category (number of stars), capacity (number of guests that the hotel is able to host at the same time) and type of hotel (according to the classification of FEHM).

The sample of hotels was collected from the Federation of Majorca's Hotels Enterprises (FEHM), which had, at the time of this research, 932 hotels. Using an interval confidence of 95% and error margin of 5%, 284 hotels were randomly selected to compose the sample. The websites were evaluated during the month of June, 2003.

6. RESULTS ANALYSIS

The data collected was analyzed using the software SPSS version 11. In order to characterize the sample's demographics, it is presented the distribution of hotels in the demographic variables collected. The distribution of hotels in categories was: 1 star - 24 hotels (8.5% of the sample); 2 stars - 60 hotels (21.1%), 3 stars - 123 hotels (43.3%), 4 stars - 40 hotels

(14.1%), 5 stars - 2 hotels (0.7%) of hotels, not star-classified - 35 hotels (12.3%). According to the FEHM, the hotels that were not classified belong to a specific kind of hotel, which have a different profile of targeted public. They are the agricultural tourism hotels, also called Agrotourism hotels, or interior tourism hotels.

The hotel capacity variable was grouped from the number of guests the hotel can host at the same time. Each group had its lower and upper lodging capacity determined so that the number of hotels in each one became uniformly distributed. The lower and upper limits and the number of hotels in each of them are shown in Table 2 next.

The distribution of hotels according to the type of hotel was: 1) Hotels - 132 firms (46.5% of the sample); 2) Apartments - 43 firms (15.1%); 3) Apartment Hotels - 43 firms (15.1%); 4) Agrotourism - 26 firms (9.2%); 5) Hostals - 12 firms (4.2%); 6) Residence Hostal- 8 firms (2.8%); 7) Interior Tourism - 7 firms (2.5%); 8) Residence Hotel- 3 firms (1.1%); and 9) Others - 10 firms (3.5%). The reference to apartments is normally used when the rooms are equipped with kitchens, and hostals are usually referenced to small and low-priced hotels, with shared bathrooms.

Table 1 - Distribution of hotels in capacity category

No. of guests		No. of hotels	No. of guests		No. of hotels
Min	Max		Min	Max	
4	18	28	190	233	28
19	42	28	254	318	28
44	94	30	319	418	28
102	137	28	419	542	29
140	188	29	554	1255	28
		Total			284

The first analysis attempt is to identify which kind of hotel had a website, and which had not. From the 284 hotels in the sample, 126 (or 44.4% of the sample) had a website. Contrasting it with hotel category, it can be observed that the one with more presence on the Web was the 4-star category, with 80% of them with a website. Secondly, the not-classified hotels followed with 54.3% of them with a website. Thirdly, the 3- and 5-star hotels were present

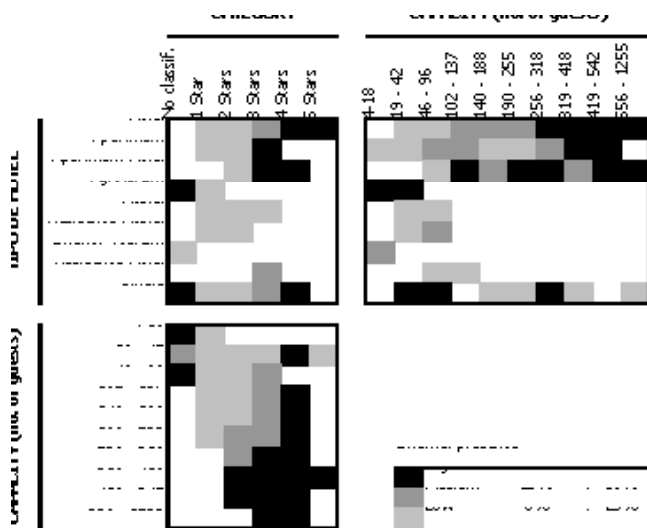
in the Internet with practically half of them with a website (50.4% and 50%, respectively). At last, the 2- and 1-star hotels presented the weakest Internet exposure, with 18.3% and 4.2% of them having websites, respectively.

Relative to the hotel capacity, Internet presence had a direct linear association, with one exception. The bigger the hotel, the more frequent was its Internet presence, apart from for the smallest ones. The biggest group, with capacity from 556 to 1255 guests, had 75% of presence on the web. This presence index gets lower as hotel capacity decreases, until hotels with capacity ranging from 19 to 42 guests, which had a 14.3% presence on the web. The exception in this linear association was the smaller hotel group, with capacity from 4 to 18 guests, which had 50% of Internet presence.

Contrasting Internet presence with the type of hotel, it can be observed that the Apartment Hotels were the ones with more Internet presence, with 67.4%, followed by the Agrotourism with 53.8%; Hotels, with 47%; Interior Tourism, with 42.9%; Others, with 40%; Residence Hotels, with 33.3%; Apartments, with 25.6%; Residence Hostals, with 12.5% and Hostals, with 8.3%.

From a conjoint analysis of the data presented earlier, it can be suggested that in Majorca there were two distinctive groups of hotels with strong presence on the Web: the big hotels categorized with 3 and 4 stars and the small Agrotourism hotels. This indicates that hotel category, and not capacity or market segmentation, had a direct relation with Internet presence. Small hotels with low budget customers, like the Hostals, were also present. In spite of their weaker Internet presence, this confirms the literature about the low investment required to establish a website and consequently maintain a direct relation with clients (Chaffey *et al*, 2000; Rayman-Bacchus and Molina, 2001; Serra, 2002). In order to show these groups, it is necessary to represent the three demographic variables together with the Internet presence. Table 3 next shows the three views of the same analytical "cube".

Table 2 - Majorca Hotels present on the Web



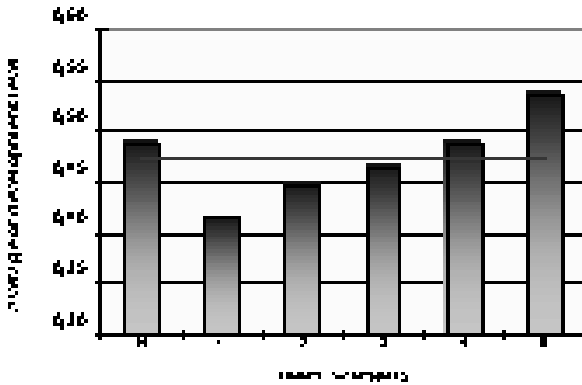
The next analysis scope was to verify the level of development of hotels websites. The website development level presented a general average of 0.47 and standard deviation of 0.15. As its skewness and kurtosis was respectively -0.28 and -0.27, it can be said that its distribution resembles a normal curve, which suggests the efficiency of the measurement instrument.

Analyzing the dimensions of the websites development level, in relation to the general average, it can be suggested that hotels websites were “good” in information and esthetics, with averages of 0.63 and 0.78, respectively. The preoccupation with navigability, interactivity and online reservations could be considered “reasonable”, with all three dimensions averaging 0.53. Attention should be paid to the weaker results of privacy and security policies and differentials, which can be considered “poor” and those averages were 0.18 and 0.11, respectively.

Contrasting the development level variable with the demographic ones, it can be determined which kind of hotels had better developed websites, and which ones needed more attention. Among hotel categories, the ones with better-developed websites were the 5-star hotels, with level of development average 0.54; followed by the not-classified and 4-star hotels, both with average 0.49. Next, below the general average, were the 2- and 1-star hotels, with averages 0.45 and 0.41 respectively. The chi-square test between these variables resulted 0.000. Graph 1 shows hotel category compared to website development level, with the thicker horizontal line representing the general average.

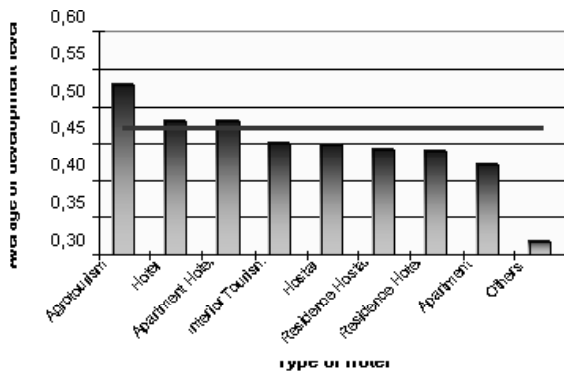
Considering hotel capacity, the group of hotels that had better developed websites was the one between 419 and 542 guests, with its level averaging 0.55. Here again, big hotels were followed by two smaller groups, with capacities ranging from 4 to 18 guests and from 19 to 42 guests. Both groups had averaged development level of 0.51. Still above the general average were hotels with capacity from 419 to 542 guests, with average 0.48. With no apparent reason, hotels that had a capacity between 256 and 318 guests were the ones with the lower level of development. This indicates the need for future research to deepen this matter. Graph 2 shows hotel capacity versus website development level, with the thicker horizontal line representing the general average.

Graph 1 - Hotel Category x website development level



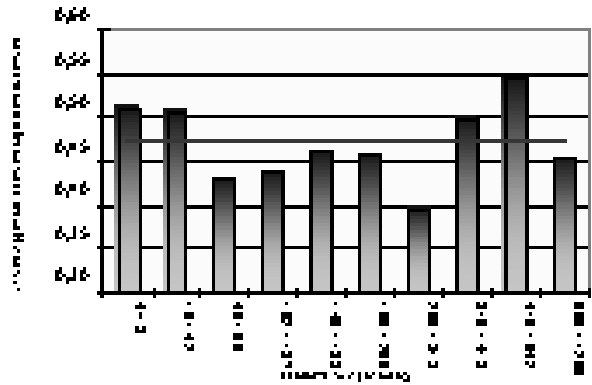
Observing the level of development contrasted by the type of the hotel, it is clear that the development level of Agrotourism hotels was superior to other types. These hotels obtained a development level average of 0.53. Secondly were Hotels and Apartment Hotels with average 0.48. All other types of hotels were positioned below the general average. This could lead to the conclusion that no relationship exists between market segmentation and website development level. Segmented market hotels, like Agrotourism, had as much website development levels as general public hotels, like the type “Hotels”. Graph 3 shows the development level against type of hotel.

Graph 3 - Type of hotel x website development level



Apart of the dimensions, some contrasts between single variables and demographics also show interesting results, as is the case with hotel capacity and the presence of newsletters (chi-square 0.029). This association shows that the bigger the hotel, the stronger the presence

Graph 2 - Hotel Capacity x website development level



of newsletters in the website. This was probably due to the more complex organizational structure of these hotels, compared to smaller ones, and to the possible existence of more content volume to be published. As for hotel category, when crossed with the presence of privacy and security policies (chi-square 0.001), hotels with higher star classification had a higher concern over their guests data privacy and security. This indicates, besides the better conditions these hotels had to invest in such technology (firewalls, cryptography, and the like), a pre-occupation over corporate image.

When looking to online reservation, the majority of hotels (82.4%) presented this feature in their sites, being it through an online form (78%) or e-mail (22%). From the reservations sent to hotels, 39.8% had an answer in less than 4 hours. This promptness was facilitated by the presence, in some cases, of online reservation systems. Between 4 and 24 hours, 28.2% of the reservations were answered, making it 67.8% answered in the first 24 hours. The reservations made through online forms had a faster answer: 38 of them were returned in less than 4 hours, if compared to the ones made through e-mail, from which only 3 were answered in this time. On the other hand, there is a statistic which causes some worry: 18.4% of all the reservations had an answer greater than one week or did not had any answer at all. This poses an alert to hotels that want to establish a presence on the Internet. If their internal processes are not reviewed in order to respond the consumer demands made through it, they are risking a

worse result than that of not going online. When his reservation form is ignored, the client's perception remains as if he is not wanted as a guest. The new media must rely on reviewed internal processes. Table 4 shows data relative to this question.

Table 3 - Reservations response time

Response time	Reserved through		Total
	E-mail	Online form	
Less than 4 hrs	3	38	41 39,8%
Between 4 and 24 hrs	11	18	29 28,2%
Between 24 and 48 hrs	1	6	7 6,8%
More than 48 hrs	4	3	7 6,8%
More than 1 week/no answer	4	15	19 18,4%
Total	23	80	103 100,0%

The variable "differentials" presented significant relations as much with hotel category as with capacity (chi-squared 0.000 and 0.003, respectively). The higher the hotel category and capacity, the weaker its differentials presented. From the qualitative analysis of the comments associated to this variable, it was possible to verify that the main differentials presented by those with lower capacity and lower or no category classification were: better hotel photos, qualified information about the local tourist area, better multimedia resources, pleasant navigation, and other characteristics that add value to the user experience. Maybe for having smaller organizational structures in which the hotel owner is nearer to the questions involving website construction, maybe for viewing the Internet as an strategic marketing tool for competing with the big hotel chains, maybe for both reasons, these hotels have a higher level of personalization that makes them differ from the competition.

One of the characteristics less explored by hotels in general was the publication of links to local tourist attractions. Only 5.6% of them used this feature in their websites, what indicates a lower concern on what the tourist should know about the region he is going to visit, closing the tourist attraction offer in the hotel itself and weakening the endearment process (Cano and Prentice, 1998).

7. FINAL COMMENTS

The aim of this paper was the evaluation of the website development level of Majorca's hotels. As seen in the literature that addresses the subject, no tested instrument for that purpose was found. Therefore, based on a qualitative analysis of those same studies, some items could be extracted to compose such an instrument and 284 hotels of Majorca's websites were measured with it. It is recognized here that the reliability of the instrument was not established and it is a question to be addressed in the future. However, some results and conclusions could be extracted from the findings, which could be of managerial concern.

Hotels must adapt their marketing practices to the new media, making more extensive use of their potentialities. At the interface, interactivity and endearment could be more extensively explored to approximate hotel products and services to the clients needs. Internally, processes have to be revised to keep the website "alive" and away from disappointing customers' expectations. Also, smaller hotels should initiate their Internet strategies in order not to loose contact to marketing needs.

The attention hotels are paying to websites may be proportional to their importance in obtaining profits. As intermediaries are still on stage and playing an important role in sales, hotels are yet strongly attached to them. A hotel website is competing as well among other Internet sales sources, such as Central Reservation Systems, and may be used as secondary, rather richer, information source, additional to the ones obtained in travel agencies. However, as Internet penetration in homes increases and intermediaries role decreases, the importance of the hotel's website may raise as well and managerial attention must be brought to it in order to keep in touch with the future.

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