

# Chapter 20

## Website Adoption for Agritourism Companies: Key Features and Perceptions of Customers

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this article is to analyze the influence of the key features of agritourism companies' websites on customers purchasing decision-making process, by measuring the level of perceived relevance and satisfaction of customers about the website's features. Empirical research was conducted based on a four-stage website adoption model, adapted from previous literature. A web-based questionnaire was addressed to a sample of Italian tourists who experienced a stay at an agritourism after selecting it through the website. By combining the perceived satisfaction and importance attributed to a series of website features, the priorities to take into account to design a website and to establish its main on-line services have been identified. In order to identify which variables have more influence in defining the overall evaluation of a website, a regression analysis was conducted. This study provides useful guidance on the main features of a website on which investments for improvement may be addressed, and which on-line services should be activated.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the last fifty years, the rural development policies of the European Union have undergone profound changes. In this evolution, agriculture started to play a new role in order to meet the emerging needs of

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citizens as regards food (availability, price, variety, quality and safety), safeguard the environment, and ensure farmers an acceptable standard of living. At the same time, this new role contributes to preserve rural communities and landscapes as a precious component of the European heritage. In addition, the natural functions of agriculture have been enriched with touristic functions (Putzel, 1984; Nickerson, Black & McCool, 2001).

In Italy, the relationship between agriculture and tourism has been mainly expressed by agritourism, which allows tourists to appreciate all features that characterize a territory: culture, craftsmanship, history, traditions, landscape, environment, food and wine (Putzel, 1984; Nickerson et al., 2001; Platania & Privitera, 2006; Havlíček, Lohr, Mejkalová, Grosz & Benda, 2013; Chinnici, Pecorino, Rizzo & Rapisarda, 2014; Musso & Francioni, 2015; Francioni, Vissak & Musso, 2015).

Today, holidays on agritourisms have become a mass tourism phenomenon and competition has increased significantly. Moreover, with the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) information available to potential customers have also increased (Wan, 2002). Indeed, the Internet plays a decisive role in the purchasing decision-making process. In particular, the company website represents the place where consumers can gather information, compare and make a decision (Buhalis, 1998).

Tourists who choose holidays in agritourisms are different from those who stay in hotels. They are more selective as regards certain requirements: contact with nature, quality of food, quiet places, silence, relax, etc. (Phillip, Hunter & Blackstock, 2010). The choice is accurate, and tourists prefer to choose through the website of agritourisms rather than using online travel agents (OTAs) such as Expedia, Booking, Airbnb, etc.; and/or meta-search as Trivago, Tripadvisor, Kayak, etc. (Kim, Kim & Han, 2007). According to the extant literature, the decision-making process related to the accommodation purchase is not completely rational, being influenced by social and psychological factors (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981) and by the mental image about the destination (Um & Crompton, 1990; Obenour, Langfelder & Groves, 2005; Nuraeni, Arru & Novani, 2014).

The aim of this study is to analyze the influence of the key features of agritourisms' websites on customers purchasing decision-making process. After a literature review on the decision-making process in tourism and the website adoption by tourism companies, the results of an empirical research on the level of perceived relevance and satisfaction of customers about agritourisms' websites features will be presented. Finally, discussion and conclusions will follow.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Decision-Making Process on Tourism Destinations**

The decision-making process is the process that involves choosing among all the possible available solutions (Yang, Lin & Chang 2010). According to Rong (1999) making a decision means making a choice in a specific condition after carefully considering all the alternatives. When the decision-making process involves a tourism customer, the fundamental decisions taken by the customer concern six aspects: whether to travel, where to travel, when to travel, what to do, how long to stay and how much to spend (Nuraeni et al., 2014).

In the literature, several researches on tourism decision-making have tried to measure and understand this process, which is not easily observable, since consumers are not fully aware of their decisions (Siraka & Woodside, 2005). About this, inhomogeneous results emerged. Wahab, Crampon & Rothfield

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