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ANALYSIS OF GUEST RATINGS AND REVIEWS FROM THE PLATFORM “BOOKING” FOR DESTINATION PLOVDIV

Stefan Videv

Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Bulgaria

E-mail: videv_stefan@abv.bg

Abstract

Using the methods of comprehensive statistical research, case study and content analysis, the current article tries to summarize the information from guest reviews available in the platform “Booking” for destination Plovdiv, to compare the data for the different types of accommodation, to prepare specific user profiles for the destination as well as for the typical Plovdiv accommodation facilities – hotels, guest houses, apartments and hostels according to their customers.

Keywords: “Booking”, tourist destination Plovdiv, case study, content analysis

INTRODUCTION

The publicly published reviews and ratings regarding used tourist products and services can be evaluated in three positions:

a) by the users of tourist products and services - as a type of post-purchase behavior, i.e. assessment of used tourist goods and services;

b) by the management of the tourist sites which were the subject to evaluation concerning their reputation;

c) by the potential customers of the evaluated tourist sites - as one of the important sources of information for a future travel (along with personal experience, the influence of relatives and friends, travel agencies, tourist advertising, etc.).

Once published, user evaluations and opinions become available to a wide range of potential customers on popular browsers such as Google, specialized platforms such as Booking, TripAdvisor and Trivago, forums such as Magelanci, BGmama, travel blogs and influencers who publish materials on Instagram, Facebook, etc. According to data from a

national survey¹ of the population in Bulgaria, sites that collect and present comments and ratings of other travelers are the third most important source of information for making a travel decision (26% of the respondents), followed by recommendations from friends, colleagues and family – 48, 6% and personal experience – 46, 3%.

According to a GfK² study, nearly 54% of customers use online reviews to obtain information about a product or a service. 53% of TripAdvisor users say that they would not book a hotel if it does not have a single review - a fact that speaks a lot for the role of social media in consumer choice. The reviews of previous customers already count more in choosing a hotel than its category. More and more tourist sites take measures not only for their online presence, but also for managing their online reputation thus realizing that the high user rating is an investment that can bring long-term benefits.

The studied specialized site “Booking” is not only a booking platform, but also a huge source of verified and reliable user ratings and opinions which serve to guide and facilitate

¹ https://www.parliament.bg/pub/ncpi/20210802124248_NCPI_Tourism_2021.pdf

² clientric.bg/academy/bg/review-komentari-rezervacii-chast-1

decisions about future tourist travels for millions of users¹.

The subject of the study are the indicators used by the platform “Booking” to assess the various aspects of post-purchase tourist behavior.

The object of this study is the total information available regarding the data on the “Booking” indicators for destination Plovdiv.

The aims of this study are as follows:

a) Summarizing the information about the places of accommodation in the territory of the city of Plovdiv according to the selected evaluation indicators;

b) Comparative analysis between individual types of accommodation (hotels, apartments, guest houses and hostels) in order to track some statistically significant trends;

c) In-depth analysis of guest opinions and ratings of typical accommodations in order to constitute their user profile;

RESEARCH METHODS

Considering the specificity of the studied subject, the following combination of methods was used in the current study:

a) the method of the comprehensive statistical survey, i.e. all tourist sites in Plovdiv active in the “Booking” system were studied.

b) regarding the evaluations and opinions of people, some methodological limitations follow: taken into account are only the opinions of persons who booked their stay via “Booking” in the last 3 years and those who preferred to assess their stay by providing feedback on the “Booking” platform. It means that we considered a limited number of visitors for the studied sites. Besides that, we also relied on the respondents' method when analyzing their opinions and assessments.

c) The a“Booking” system for guest reviews allows: preparation of a profile of a destination (in this case Plovdiv) according to

the criteria set by booking/category, distance to the center, type of accommodation, amenities, price, rating, etc./ comparison between the individual types and categories of accommodation both by overall rating and 7 individual indicators constituting this rating, namely: staff, comfort, amenities, cleanliness, location, quality/price ratio and free wifi with a reference to the number of persons who evaluated each site for the last 3 years.

d) the case study method is used when we made a deep study of typical cases. The procedure allows us to choose one of each type of accommodation: apartment, guest house, hostel and hotel which has an average rating compared to the overall rating. Thus, we set the selected typical object to a more in-depth study using the content analysis method. It is applied by measuring the frequency with which a certain number of keywords occur in the guest reviews of the respective site. These keywords vary according the site. For example, they can be: room, location, noise, cleanliness, parking, bathroom, restaurant, bed, etc. and also distributions of guest opinions according to the criteria of the tourist group (families, couples, friends, independent travelers and business travelers) and language used (generally Bulgarian and foreign). By measuring the frequency with which they occur and the positive (resp. negative) use of the keywords mentioned above, we try to constitute the typical profile of the site according to its guests.

DISCUSSION

The most significant indicators for the Booking platform for destination Plovdiv can be summarized in the Figures 1-3.

The profile of destination Plovdiv according to the guests registered in the “Booking” platform looks like this: depending on the type of accommodation, apartments predominate (63%), mainly with a three-star

¹ https://www.booking.com/reviews_guidelines.bg.html

categorization which are located approximately a few kilometers from the city center, more than 80% of which offer a price per night of up to 200 BGN per room, more than 90% offer the option of free cancellation, more than 95% have free wifi and more than 2/3 offer parking. All have air conditioning, more than 80% have their own bathroom, all apartments have their own kitchen, more than 60% have a balcony or a terrace and 95% have a flat screen TV.

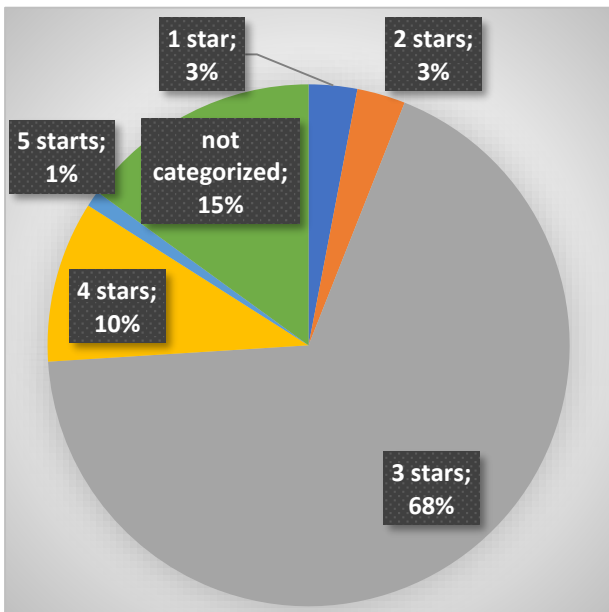


Figure 1. Site category
Source: Author's research

In accordance with the chosen methodological approach, four typical places of accommodation were selected which have a rating matching the average, namely: Hotel "Ostrova", Central Park Studio apartment, Boutique Guest House Coco and Pajama Hostel whose guest opinions underwent a quantitative content analysis.

The opinions of the guests of Hotel "Ostrova" form the following online profile: the hotel is visited mainly by Bulgarians (about 60%), families and couples and to a lesser extent by independent travelers and businessmen and it offers excellent service. Key impressions describing its virtual image are location (rated as excellent), pool (rated rather positively), breakfast (rated rather negatively), rooms (rated

rather positively), rooms (rated rather positively, bathroom /with a negative rating/ and cleanliness /with an excellent rating).

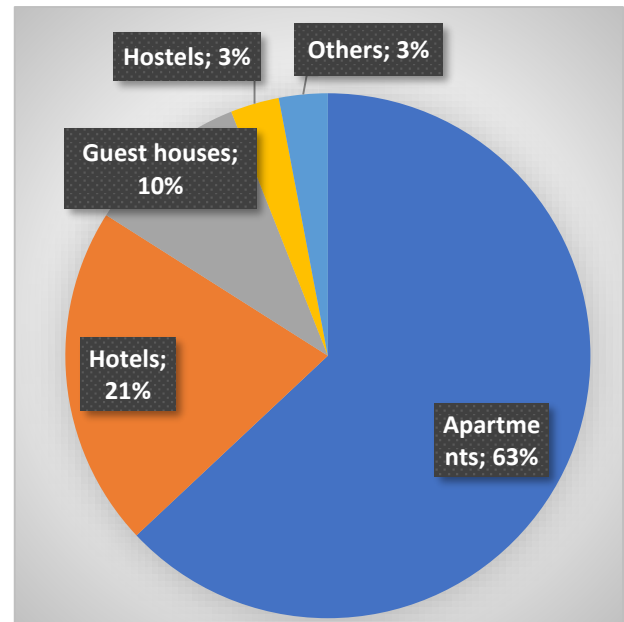


Figure 2. Type of accommodation
Source: Author's research

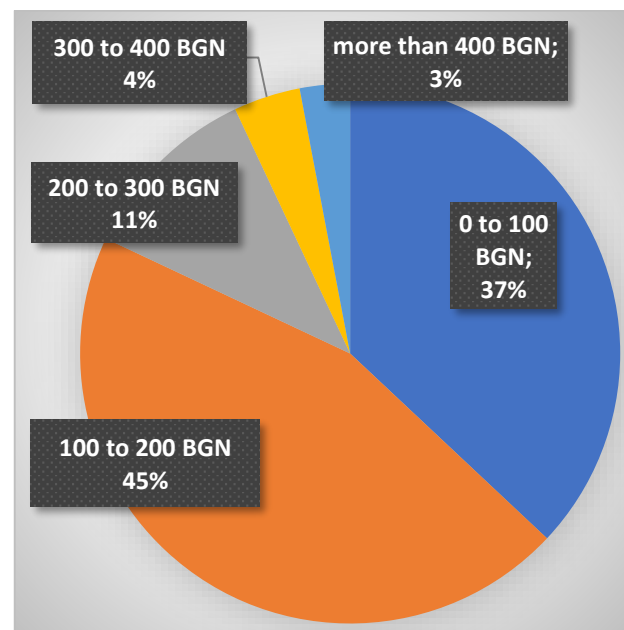


Figure 3. Price per night
Source: Author's research

Central Park Studio's profile from the perspective of its guests looks like this: the apartment is mainly visited by families and less by people traveling on business as well as by

couples, as nearly 80% of the guests were Bulgarians. Important indicators for the tourists were: location, parking, cleanliness, peace, etc. all of them have an excellent rating.

The profile of Boutique Guest House Coco according to customers who have registered overnight stays via the “Booing” platform, looks like this: the guest house is visited almost equally by foreigners 55% and Bulgarians 45%, mainly by business travelers and to a lesser extent by couples who paid attention to location (excellent), breakfast (very good), room (very good), cleanliness (excellent) and bed (very good).

Pajama hostel receives a profile specific for this type of accommodation. It is mostly visited by foreigners (85%) of various nationalities, mostly English-speaking, traveling on business. Keywords for visitors are: location (rated excellent), cleanliness (excellent), room (good), bed and kitchen (very good).

CONCLUSION

Based on collected rich quantitative information about accommodation places in the territory of the city of Plovdiv, we could highlight the following main conclusions:

1. The city of Plovdiv with a population of about 330 000 residents has a large number of categorically differentiated accommodation facilities - more than 300 objects are registered only in the “Booking” system, most are apartments (245), followed by hotels (82), guest houses (32) and hostels (12) which meet the needs of a wide range of potential tourists (business travelers, groups of friends, families, couples, as well as solo travelers, etc.).

2. The accommodation facilities generally meet the requirements of the modern tourist staying in an underdeveloped EU member country: categorization, parking spaces, air conditioning, cable TV, kitchenette /in the apartments, balcony, free WiFi, own bathroom, non-smoking rooms, soundproofing, etc.

3. In general, all places of accommodation in the territory of the city of Plovdiv receive fairly high average ratings as well as those regarding the individual indicators. The average rating of all accommodations is 8,8. The comparatively higher rating of apartments (9,2) and guesthouses (8,7) compared to hotels (8,1) is striking; it is explained by the fact that the first ones do not employ hired staff, but are managed by a private host which is a guarantee of a higher quality of services. Regardless of the small differences, the criteria location and staff (9 each) received the highest evaluation from the visitors and the lowest evaluation goes to amenities (8,6) and comfort (8,7). Differentiated analysis shows that the main problems for hotels, hostels and guesthouses according to their guests are providing satisfactory comfort and amenities to guests. On the other hand, the hotels are relatively lower rated in terms of their location compared to the rest of the accommodations.

4. The differentiated analysis of the guest opinions for 4 typical places of accommodation, namely the typical Plovdiv hotel, hostel, guest house and apartment, allows us to draw a conclusion that confirms the above mentioned trends, and at the same time, it reveals some new problems, namely:

a) 2/3 of those who wrote reviews and stayed in hotels and apartments are Bulgarian citizens. Among the rest, opinions predominate written in English, French, Russian, German and Turkish. Only 40% of those staying in guest houses and 15% of those staying in hostels are Bulgarians.

b) Hotels in Plovdiv are visited mainly by families 26% and couples 31%, the apartments more often by families 47% and less by couples 19%, the guest houses - by businessmen 38% and couples - 26%, and the hostels mostly by business travelers.

According to the analyzed reviews, the guests pay most attention to the location of the site, followed by cleanliness, condition and furniture of the rooms and beds. We could say

that these are the three most important aspects of post-purchase evaluation and hence the tourist satisfaction.

5. We suggest some tools for improving the services and the reputational image of the respective sites as follows: monitoring the reviews in the various tourist portals, responding to each review in a timely manner, reminding the reception upon check-out, by email, via QR code brochure in the hotel room in order to stimulate the evaluation of the stay and above all, to practically solve the problems mentioned in the reviews¹.

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¹ <https://clientric.bg/academy/bg/negativni-komentari-online-reputaciya>