

The Assessment of Website Design Quality in Thermal Tourism Industry: The Comparative Study for Turkish and German Thermal Hotels

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Abstract

In the Internet Age, website design, content and efficiency are very important for customers and companies as well. Website design researches increasingly focused on design quality and contents in last years. In terms of the thermal hotel marketing perspectives, high website design quality and contents offer a number of advantages such as the opportunity to convince potential customers to select hotels and observe all thermal hotels services without staying there. However, thermal hotels are also work like health institutions. Their websites ought to allow their customers to access more health related information and serve as a platform for gaining access to healthcare information. Thus, they should be designed health oriented, instead of just marketing and public relations purposes. The main objectives of this study is to call website designers' attention to thermal hotel website contents, and to compare the thermal hotels' websites between Baden-Baden, Germany and Afyonkarahisar, Turkey destinations with Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method. At the end of the study, the characteristics of the thermal hotels website design quality are discussed via AHP, and some recommendations are given to designers, hotel managers and public institutions responsible for health institutions related to thermal hotel website design requirements and standards.

Keywords: Thermal Tourism, Internet Marketing, Website Design

Introduction

Differences in tourists' wants and needs, changes in lifestyles have forced businesses operating in the tourism industry to create and focus on different market segments. One of the created market segments is thermal hotel classification in accommodation industry. Nowadays, thermal tourism is an important and growing part of the tourism industry. Because of the intangibility nature of the thermal hotel service, hotel managers strive to persuade the consumer about the quality of service they offer. Website quality is one of the important tools of creating a sense of quality for businesses operating service industry, and giving useful and beneficial information effectively. Designing, implementing and managing a website is a process. Success in website design quality depends on how well the designers adopt and implement a user-driven design process. Thus, thermal hotel websites plays very important role to give detailed information about their thermal water, explain their differences and provide access to customers all over the world.

In Turkey, thermal waters obtained from over 1500 sources are superior in Europe with their flow and temperature as well as their various physical and chemical properties (yigm.kulturturizm.gov.tr). In thermal tourism literature, there is the need for more examinations on thermal hotels' website in terms of content quality, design standards and health oriented information quality. The main objective of this study are to draw website designers' attention to contents of the thermal hotel website, and compare thermal hotels website located in different countries. Thus, in this study, the importance of hotel website quality in thermal tourism industry is explained and Turkish and German are examined and compared with the features by conducting a content analysis with Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP).

Conceptual Framework

Tourists have increasingly used to the Internet as the source for destination information, trip planning and accommodation booking (Choi et al., 2007), 80% of the tourists explored for hotel information using websites, with more than 40% tourists made their bookings through hotels' host or third-party websites (Toh et al., 2011), more than 50% of the reservations of major brand hotels were made via the Internet in 2010 (Pan et al., 2013), many tourists booked their travel activities from the Internet (Yang et al., 2014), and website information can be used a competitive tool for hotel managers (Islam and Čavlek, 2016). Website design quality of travel websites impacts the tourist behaviors and their purchase intent (Dedeke, 2016). Thus, the website design should be taken into consideration for successful internet marketing. A good website design can keep their customers. If customers feel that they have to make too many clicks to find

something what they're looking for or they cannot get enough information, they are likely to leave, and it is very easy to loose potential customers because changing website is at the click of a button (Barutçu, 2006). Consequently, a successful website feels customers attracted, reliable and trustworthy, contain sufficient and relevant contents, provides customer satisfaction and attracts more interest and communication, increases sales, and finally strengthens the brand image (Liua and Kirk, 2000: 24; Cox and Dale, 2002; Lončarić et al, 2010; Lončarić et al, 2013; Islam and Čavlek, 2016). However, poor thermal hotel website design can result in a loss of potential customers. Therefore, hotels' website design quality is one of the best tool to attract new customers, convince them to book and stay their hotels and give detailed information about thermal health and waters.

Thermal Hotels Website and Design Quality

Designing effective website is very similar to designing a physical landscape. Website should not only create a sense of the landscape, but also provide interactive, enter into the landscape and live the place (Rosen and Purinton, 2004). Moreover, the website should be designed for the target customers, considered by users' perspectives, adapted to their cultures, and localized websites in terms of currency, color sensitivities, product or service names and geographical examples and so on (Abelse, et al., 1998; Gommans et al., 2001; Cyr et al., 2008). It is clear that a website design that creates quality sense for users, easy to use, sufficient information capacity and adapted to the cultural characteristics of users will create a competitive advantage.

In the user-based website design process, the users play very important role. The website is designed for the user and required to provide access throughout the process, and design decisions are reflected by users rather than the designers' point of view. Thus, user experience has begun to be considered throughout the design process (Abelse, et al., 1998: 40). Website design should be simple and easy to use. The simplicity of design makes the site more attractive. Some web design specialists have estimated it to be 10 seconds to attract people to a website. For this reason, slow loading websites are a major displeasure for users. Another important issue is that the website should be distinctive. A website with a different identity will appeal to tired surfers, differentiate the company and make the site more memorable (Rosen and Purinton, 2004: 793). Thermal hotel website as the company should reveal the image that the hotel is trying to create (Cox and Dale, 2002).

There are many studies on website design in Turkey. Karamustafa and Öz (2010) evaluated the 643 websites of companies in Turkey with content analysis and concluded that they had fairly low performance average,

especially hotels' websites had a limited online trading abilities and designed like an online brochure. Avciokurt and Giritlioğlu (2011) have reviewed the 98 thermal hotels website in Turkey, and they stated that thermal hotels' websites quality were low, and could not use the internet as a productive marketing tool. Toprak et al., (2014: 352) reviewed the websites of the thermal hotels in the southeastern part of the country, and found that there were not available in other languages option in 50% of hotel website, some problems in their reservation information including policies, payment and online communication with customer representatives, and insufficient website management in terms of information capacity and attention to update. Ateş and Boz (2015) found that hotels used their websites for promotional and advertising purposes, paid enough attention to facility and room photos in website design, however, did not pay attention to website efficiency.

The comparative study for Turkish and German Thermal Hotels Website Design

Despite the fact that Turkey has very rich geothermal potential and therapeutic nature and high thermal waters, there is no competitive environment with European countries due to the inadequacy of the facilities in quantity and quality and the lack of thermal destinations with thermal facilities in international standards. Germany has high thermal tourism market share in the world, and thermal tourism has become an important industry in Germany, which has 263 official certified thermal centers, the total bed capacity of the facilities is 750.000 (yigm.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR). At this point, German and Turkish thermal hotels are in competition with each other, and benchmarking based on theoretically sound design criteria can serve academic researchers, especially those who study the causes and consequences of website design, because website design benchmarking is a timely, useful and relevant research for both practical and academic purposes (Kim et al., 2003: 16). Therefore, thermal hotels in Baden-Baden / Germany and Afyonkarahisar / Turkey destinations are compared in terms of website design quality.

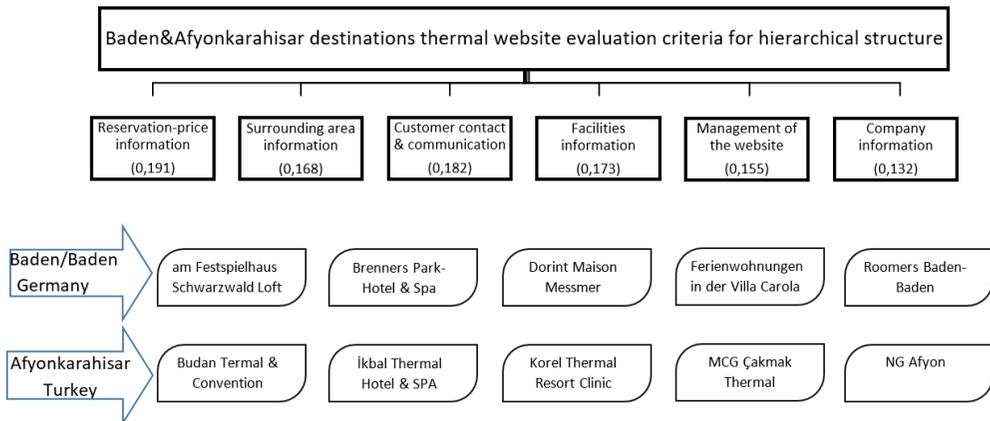
Methodology

Five-star hotels in Baden-Baden, Germany and Afyonkarahisar, Turkey were determined as the population frame to evaluate the contents of their websites. The weights of the 6 factors (reservation-price information, surrounding area information, customer contact and communication, facilities information, management of the website and company information with 58 variables) in the AHP were found by normalizing the importance mean values obtained by Salem and Cavlek (2016). 10 hotel websites were

selected researchers with Judgmental Sampling to examine their contents, and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method developed by Saaty (1977) was used to determine the weights of alternatives according to the objective criteria of the study.

According to the AHP, the hierarchical structure in which the factors (alternatives) and alternatives take place is first created and then the weights of these factors are determined. At the next stage, a matrix is created in which the weights of the alternatives are weighted according to each weighted factor. In the final stage, the vectors of the alternatives (web pages) are determined by multiplying the vector of the weights of the obtained matrix and the factors. Salem and Cavlek (2016) studies were used in determining the factors and weighting these factors. Figure 1 depicts a hierarchical structure in which alternatives of the two places are identified. The weights of the factors in the hierarchical structure were found by normalizing the importance mean values obtained by Salem and Cavlek (2016).

Figure 1. Hierarchical structure and factor weights



The web pages of five-star hotels in the Baden-Baden and Afyonkarahisar regions have been evaluated by the researchers using the binary comparison matrices, which are presented in a hierarchical structure and distinguished for each of the six main factors given subheadings. The consistency of the binary comparison matrix ($CR < 0.10$) was checked.

Findings

Calculation of Weights of 5 Star Hotel Web Pages in Two Separate Destinations

In this phase, the website of the thermal hotels sampled from Baden-Baden, Germany as am Festspielhaus Schwarzwald Loft, the Brenners Park-Hotel & Spa, the Dorint Maison Messmer, the Ferienwohnungen in der Villa

Carola and the Roomers Baden-Baden hotels were first evaluated with the binary comparison matrices according to 6 factors presented in the hierarchical structure. Table 1 shows the weights and final weights of these hotels according to the website factors, without specifying the hotel name. According to this analysis, the website of Hotel B is superior to all other factors except for two factors as reservation-price information and company information, and is ranked first with 38.2%. Hotel B's website design quality is higher than others, and Hotel E has lowest design quality.

Table 1. Baden-Baden destination websites according to the factors and their final weights

FACTORS	W	HOTELS				
		A	B	C	D	E
Reservation-price information	0,191	0,212	0,187	0,083	0,452	0,066
Surrounding area information	0,168	0,280	0,402	0,090	0,157	0,071
Customer contact and communication	0,182	0,178	0,540	0,109	0,117	0,056
Facilities information	0,173	0,189	0,455	0,044	0,242	0,071
Management of the website	0,155	0,209	0,525	0,042	0,150	0,074
Company information	0,132	0,478	0,159	0,071	0,182	0,110
GENERAL		0,248	0,382	0,074	0,223	0,073

Similarly, the website of the thermal hotels sampled from Afyonkarahisar, Turkey as Budan Thermal & Convention, Ikbal Thermal Hotel & SPA, Korel Thermal Resort Clinic, MCG Cakmak Thermal and NG Afyonkarahisar hotels are evaluated with the binary comparison matrices according to 6 factors presented in the hierarchical structure. Table 2 shows the weight and final weight of these hotels according to the website factors, without specifying the hotel name.

Table 2. Afyonkarahisar destination websites according to the factors and their final weights

FACTORS	W	HOTELS				
		A	B	C	D	E
Reservation-price information	0,191	0,140	0,429	0,286	0,039	0,106
Surrounding area information	0,168	0,177	0,039	0,439	0,088	0,257
Customer contact and communication	0,182	0,436	0,271	0,133	0,043	0,117
Facilities information	0,173	0,159	0,310	0,333	0,057	0,141
Management of the website	0,155	0,135	0,339	0,419	0,067	0,040
Company information	0,132	0,237	0,110	0,226	0,031	0,396
GENERAL		0,215	0,258	0,305	0,054	0,167

In the Afyonkarahisar destination, the website of Hotel C is superior to all factors except customer contact and communication and company information factors and is in the first place with 30.5%. Thus, Hotel C's website design quality is higher than others, and Hotel D has lowest design quality.

Research Results and Conclusion:

When web designs of thermal hotels in Baden-Baden and Afyonkarahisar are examined, it is seen that the factors of final weight order are the same for both regions. According to this, reservation and price information have the highest weight while general information about the business has low weight. These results are similar to Karamustafa and Öz (2010). It is normal for the price and reservation information to have the highest weight on the websites of both regions, when it is thought that the consumer is using the Internet for the most price comparison.

While hotels in the Baden-Baden region do not give enough information about thermal pools, features and benefits, it is seen that the thermal hotels in Afyonkarahisar give these more details. Many of the hotels in the Baden-Baden region use a lot of photos, however these pictures make the contents of the thermal hotel website weak. Although Baden-Baden thermal hotels have a high visual attractiveness, it is difficult to access the information on the websites, and find some information about thermal waters. Though the information capacity of the website of Hotel B has the highest weight in the Baden-Baden region, its visual appeal is weak compared to others. It is seen that the information quality of thermal hotels' website of Afyonkarahisar region are quite adequate, and they are more useful than those in the Baden-Baden region. Customer reviews and customer surveys are available on the website of each hotel in both regions. In consequence, Baden-Baden, Germany hotels do not have enough information about thermal pools, features and benefits, however, Afyonkarahisar, Turkey hotels give these information in detail. Moreover, Baden-Baden, Germany hotels pictures are very attractive, the magnificent scenes attract people. However, it is difficult to get the actual information from the images.

The results of study will lead to many practical implications for health institutions, hotel managers, marketers and website designers. First, thermal hotel websites are an effective information and communication network between hotels and their customers, and with creating an interactive thermal hotel website, marketing managers of hotels can increase volumes of sales, improve the brand images and raise the overall outcome of their marketing activities. However, thermal hotels are used for health purposes. Therefore, thermal hotel website should not be used only as part of marketing strategies, but healthy purposes. Second, to use the website information as a competitive advantage tool, hotel managers should harmonize the web information with customers' preferences, and thermal health. Moreover, the fact that the websites of the thermal hotels located in the same region are so different. This findings is the greatest indication that the website design changes according to the designers, and there is no

standard for thermal hotels in this respect. Third, thermal hotel accommodation is a health-related area, and information-oriented standards for thermal hotel website design are required. In further research, the website design requirements and standards should be categorized, analyzed and discussed for thermal hotels.

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