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## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON RURAL FACILITIES AND AGRITOURISM**

Key words: source of information, promotion, the Internet, agritourism, village, country

**ABSTRACT.** The aim of this dissertation was to diagnose the tendency of changes observed in the forms of information and promotion used by agricultural service providers and the sources of information preferred by tourists who rested in rural areas in 2001-2019. Moreover, the point of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of sources of information and promotion on rural facilities used by service providers in agritourism. The empiric studies handled by the author of the article as well as by other researches, data from different institutions and literature formed the basis for this article. A comparative analysis was used to perform the research. It should be noticed that, in every period of the study, the forms of promotion used by agricultural service providers failed to fully meet tourists' needs and expectations. In 2003, service providers believed in printed materials such as leaflets, pamphlets and catalogues as a form of advertisement and promotion, whereas tourists chose their destination to stay and relax at a rural facility relying on word-of-mouth marketing from friends, family and acquaintances. In 2012 and 2019 both parties pointed out the website as a prime source of information and the recommendations of friends and family in second place. In every empiric period, exchanges, fairs, advertising in catalogues and pamphlets as well as information in press releases, adverts on the radio or commercials in television were more important for service providers than for tourists. In order to meet tourists' expectations, farmers and village residents should take care of the standard and design of their websites. To gain knowledge and necessary help on that matter, service providers may get in touch with agricultural advisory services or representatives of agritourism associations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the modern world, the most powerful and important mass media tools are: the press, the radio, television and the Internet. They have various functions, but the informative function is considered to be the most significant one [Jaska 2013]. Nowadays, the most influential source of information is the Internet, because it gives people the opportunity to gain information about markets, clients, customers and coworkers, as well as cooperation possibilities very quickly [Janc 2013]. Currently, it is inevitable to carry out informative and promotional activities while having a business activity, due to solid competition present on the market. Without such activities even the best offers would not reach potential clients and their awareness. Promotion and branding shape client awareness and deliver necessary information to them [Jaremen 2013, p. 151]. It is a kind of dialogue between

the enterprise and the customer, which aims at inducing a desired reaction among clients and enhance all their choices over products and services, as well as create demand [Sobczyk, Celoch 2012, Jurczuk, Grontkowska 2018]. By promoting services, an enterprise may deliver the information, argumentation and temptation as well as bring promises to life and their role is to influence customer behavior and choices, as well as enhance a positive opinion about a particular brand or business and its products and services [Sikora 2013, p. 172]. It is worth highlighting that the aim of promotion is not only to publicize information about a business and its existence but also build a conversation between an entrepreneur and a recipient of the service. Due to such dialogue, the relation reflects a win-win situation, where the customer gains knowledge about a product and the entrepreneur receives constructive feedback on its offers and marketing activities. On the one hand, it helps buyers find products that they need, on the other hand, it supports entrepreneurs in the need to meet client expectations [Panasiuk 2005, p. 125, Jaremen 2013, p. 152].

Some time ago, it was very common to promote rural tourism and agritourism through: promotional catalogues and brochures, domestic and international tourist fairs/exchanges, information in mass media, articles in the newspaper and tourist magazines, during press conferences, cultural and entertainment events, information in propaganda films and commercials [Drzewiecki 2001, p. 166]. However, entrepreneurs very rarely used modern sources of information such as Internet websites and social media that today play a very special role. Therefore, it is vital to recognize which forms of promotion and information clients appreciate the most and which lead them to choose a rural area as their destination.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this dissertation was to diagnose the tendency of changes observed in the forms of information and promotion used by agricultural service providers and the sources of information preferred by tourists who took a rest in rural areas in 2001-2019. Moreover, the point of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of sources of information and promotion on rural facilities used by service providers in agritourism. The empiric studies handled by the author of the article as well as by other researches, data from different institutions and literature formed the basis for this article. Karolina Mandziuk carried out the empiric studies in 2019 in the Lublin Voivodeship and her research was also studied in this paper. A comparative analysis was used to perform the study.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The forms of promotion and information used by agricultural service providers have changed over years. The trend of changes is shown in Table 1. To conclude this analysis, it is necessary to point out that there are two tendencies among agricultural service providers. Firstly, their trust in traditional instruments of promotion and information is decreasing, and secondly they are more interested in the usage of websites and social media to reach customers in agritourism. This trend is visible, because more and more service provid-

Table 1. The sources of information on rural tourism/agritourism in 2003, 2012, 2019

Sources of information	2003*	2012**	2019***
	N = 383	N = 800	N = 55
	%		
Websites	26.4	65.4	92.7
Friends and acquaintance recommendations	25.1	77.0	83.6
Social media	-	-	78.2
Search for agritourism offers	-	-	52.7
Leaflets, catalogues, pamphlets	51.7	25.9	21.2
Press releases	17.2	14.6	12.7
Tourist exchanges and fairs	13.1	14.8	10.9
Visits at tourist information spots	-	9.8	29.1
Visits at a travel agency	-	11.1	10.9
Radio or television	-	-	5.4

The respondent could give more than one answer

Source: \* [Jachimowicz, Krzyżanowska 2004], \*\* [Agrotec Polska, IGPiZ PAN 2012],

\*\*\* own research

ers are creating websites of their agricultural offers and it is more likely for them to use social media to promote their rural business. As an effective and relatively cheap form of promotion is a recommendation given by friends or acquaintances who are satisfied with their stay in rural facilities.

The next aspect of the study was the analysis of sources of information on restful activities that might be carried out in a village. Detailed data are presented in Table 2.

Research conducted by Leszek Strzembicki has shown that, in 2001, only a small number of people used the Internet to book their stay at rural facilities. Nowadays, 90% of people do their bookings this way in the Polish village [Strzembicki 2012, p. 177]. The second crucial source of information of restful activities that might be carried out in the village in 2001-2019 was the recommendation of friends and acquaintances. Recommendations were most popular in 2001, when over 50% of respondents used it as their source of information, and in 2019 it was used by 3/4 of respondents. Rarely did respondents use traditional sources such as the press, the radio or television.

The Internet, as a crucial promotion medium, offers a wide range of attributes that influence potential clients in agritourism. The most common form of promotion is the website. Websites promote an agricultural business, advertise it and provide necessary information. It is used for branding, marketing, sales and PR purposes. Thanks to websites, it is possible to shape the image of rural facilities, communicate with customers and build loyalty and a strong relationship with them. Empiric studies conducted in 2019 looked for an answer on the following question: Which information provided on a Website about agricultural offers should be mandatory? Table 3 shows the data.

Table 2. Sources of information on restful activities that might be carried out in the village in 2001-2019

Sources of information	2001*	2003*	2012**	2013***	2019****
	N = 745	N = 413	N = 761	N = 122	N = 110
	%				
Websites	5.0	20.2	58.0	92.0	85.5
Friends and acquaintance recommendations	47.2	42.2	39.2	46.0	74.5
Search for agritourism offers	-	-	-	-	39.1
Social media	-	-	-	-	34.5
Leaflets, catalogues, pamphlets	19.5	12.7	2.4	-	5.2
Press releases	13.7	14.4	1.2	25.0	4.5
Television	2.8	2.9	-	35.0	4.5
Radio	1.1	2.7	-	-	2,7
Exchanges and tourist fairs	2.8	2.2	0.4	3.0	7.3
Visits at tourist information spots	2.0	0.2	3.7	9.0	11.8

The respondent could give more than one answer

Source: \* [Strzembicki 2005], \*\* [Zawadka 2013], \*\*\* [MRIRW 2013], \*\*\*\* own research

Table 3. Mandatory information provided on the Website about agricultural offers in the opinion of tourists and agricultural service providers

Information provided on the website	Tourists' opinions		Service providers' opinions	
	N = 110	%	N = 55	%
Price of accommodation, the catering service, additional costs	109	99.1	53	96.4
Room standard	85	77.3	42	76.4
Contact data	83	75.5	49	89.1
Location and accessibility	59	52.7	43	78.2
Description of surroundings	56	50.9	32	58.2
Photos and videos on the facilities	55	50.0	48	87.3
Type of catering	51	46.4	26	47.3
Possibility of active rest	46	41.8	28	50.9
Information about keeping pets	39	35.5	28	50.9
Accessibility of sport or fitness facilities	38	34.5	23	41.8
Accessibility of shops and restaurants	31	28.2	22	40.0
History of the region	18	16.4	7	12.7
Accessibility of medical points	17	15.5	10	18.2

\* The respondent could give more than one answer

Source: own research

Table 5. The information and promotional activities used by service providers vs. customer expectations in 2003, 2012, 2019

Information and promotional activities	2003		2012		2019	
	service providers N = 383 *	tourists N = 413 **	service providers N = 800 ***	tourists N = 761 ****	service providers N = 55 *****	tourists N = 110 *****
	%					
Websites	26.4	20.2	65.4	58.0	92.7	85.5
Recommendations from friends and acquaintances	25.1	47.2	77.0	39.2	83.6	74.5
Social media	-	-	-	-	78.2	34.5
Search for agritourism offers	-	-	-	-	52.7	39.1
Tourist information spots	-	0.2	25.9	3.7	29.1	11.8
Tourist exchanges and fairs	13.1	2.2	9.8	0.4	14.8	7.3
Leaflets, catalogues, pamphlets	51.7	12.7	25.9	2.4	21.2	5.2
Press releases	17.2	14.4	14.6	1.2	12.7	4.5
Radio, television	-	-	-	-	5.4	2.7

The respondent could give more than one answer

Source: \* [Jachimowicz, Krzyżanowska], \*\* [Strzembicki 2005], \*\*\* [Agrotec Polska, IGPiZ PAN 2012], \*\*\*\* [MRIRW 2013], \*\*\*\*\* own research

The research conducted in 2019 shows that the most important information that should be posted on a website, in the opinion of customers and service providers, is: the price of the accommodation, catering and additional costs. In second place were contact data and room standard - they were important for over 75% of tourists and service providers. Service providers appreciated more information about the location and accessibility as well as photos and videos of the facility and surroundings. The least important for both sides was information about the history of the region and medical point accessibility. Respondents also rated the elements of a website that a convincing website should include. Their answers are shown in Table 4.

Both service providers as well as tourists agreed that contact data, room photos, and accommodation price are significant elements of a website. They were also convinced that not only factual and technical aspects (the design) of the website are essential but also its functionality e.g. the possibility of adding comments or reviews, as well as online booking possibilities.

Last but not least, what was discussed in the analysis is the answer to the question: if and to what extent information and promotional activities used by service providers meet client expectations. These data are shown in Table 5.

It should be noted that, in every period of the study, the forms of promotion used by agricultural service providers failed to fully meet tourists' needs and expectations. In 2003, service providers believed in printed materials such as leaflets, pamphlets and catalogues as a form of promotion, whereas tourists chose a place to stay and relax at a rural facility relying on the recommendations of their friends, family and acquaintances. In 2012 and 2019 both parties pointed to the website as a prime source of information and recommendations of friends and family in second place. In every empiric period, exchanges, fairs, advertising in catalogues and pamphlets as well as information in press releases, radio adverts or commercials were more important for agricultural service providers than for tourists.

## SUMMARY

Analysis shows that the Internet and marketing applied is becoming more popular than traditional forms of communication. In 2001, only few tourists contacted rural facilities and agritourism farms via the Internet. Today, over 4/5 of bookings in the Polish village are made via the Internet. The second vital source of information concerning the possibilities of activities in the village in 2001-2019 were recommendations of guests, who liked their stay in the village.

It should be noted that, in every period of the study, the forms of promotion used by agricultural service providers failed to fully meet tourists' needs and expectations. In 2003, service providers believed in printed materials such as leaflets, pamphlets and catalogues as a form of promotion, whereas tourists chose a place to stay and relax at a rural facility relying on the recommendations of their friends, family and acquaintances. In 2012 and 2019 both parties pointed to the website as a prime source of information and recommendations of friends and family in second place. In every empiric period, exchanges, fairs, advertising in catalogues and pamphlets as well as information in press releases, radio adverts or commercials were more important for agricultural service providers than for tourists. To meet tourists' expectations farmers and village residents should take care of the standard and design of their websites. To gain knowledge and the necessary help on that matter, service providers may get in touch with agricultural advisory services or representatives of agritourism associations.

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## SKUTECZNOŚĆ ŹRÓDEŁ INFORMACJI O OBIEKTACH TURYSTYKI WIEJSKIEJ I AGROTURYSTYKI

Słowa kluczowe: źródła informacji, promocja, internet, agroturystyka, wieś

### ABSTRAKT

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie tendencji zmian w zakresie form informacji i promocji wykorzystywanych przez usługodawców oraz źródeł informacji preferowanych przez turystów odpoczywających na wsi, w latach 2001-2019, a także rozpoznanie skuteczności przekazów informacyjno-promocyjnych z zakresu turystyki wiejskiej/agroturystyki stosowanych przez usługodawców. Wykorzystano wyniki badań przeprowadzonych zarówno przez autorkę, jak i innych autorów z różnych ośrodków naukowych w Polsce, dane wtórne pochodzące z ekspertyz wykonanych przez różne instytucje oraz literaturę przedmiotu. Do opracowania wyników badań zastosowano metodę analizy porównawczej. Z analizy wynika, że coraz częściej tradycyjne formy komunikacji marketingowej zastępowane są przez internet. Drugim ważnym źródłem informacji o możliwościach wypoczynku na wsi w latach 2001-2019, były polecenia gości zadowolonych z pobytu. We wszystkich okresach badawczych przekaz informacyjno-promocyjny stosowany przez usługodawców nie był w pełni dostosowany do potrzeb turystów. W 2003 roku usługodawcy najbardziej cenili materiały drukowane, natomiast turyści przy wyborze miejsca wypoczynku w gospodarstwie agroturystycznym korzystali głównie z polecenia oferty przez znajomych lub rodzinę. W latach 2012 i 2019 zarówno usługodawcy, jak i turyści na pierwszym miejscu wskazywali strony internetowe, a na drugim rekomendacje zadowolonych gości z pobytu w obiektach turystyki wiejskiej/agroturystycznych. Rolnicy i mieszkańcy wsi powinni dbać o wysoki standard stron internetowych, spełniając tym samym oczekiwania turystów. Fachową pomoc w tym zakresie usługodawcy mogą uzyskać, kontaktując się z doradcami ośrodków doradztwa rolniczego lub przedstawicielami stowarzyszeń agroturystycznych.

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