

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE USAGE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN CITY AND RESORT HOTEL ESTABLISHMENTS: THE CASE OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

The usage of computer technologies with telecommunication, the recent developments in the field of microelectronics caused significant changes in communication in today's growing competition arena. The Information Technologies (IT) providing the production of data, its storage, verification and transmission are also very important for the tourism industry. The establishments operating in tourism industry need to use IT intensively to collect information about organizations, consumers, competitors and other environmental factors to transmit these data to their employees, to provide the daily operations more effectively and productively and to understand the global marketing applications.

The purpose of this study is to identify how many of the information technologies were used by city and resort hotels, their usage areas, and the attitudes of hotels towards IT. The results of the study showed that the 5-star resort hotels in Antalya had more differences compared to the hotels in İstanbul with respect to the usage of IT. These differences appeared either non existence for most of the IT or rare applications of it.

Key Words: Information Technologies, city and resort hotel establishments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, information appears as an essential source for economies. For this reason, raw material, capital and manpower configuring traditional production

factors have now become less important compared to information. As a result the quantity and type of information required by the establishments have been increasing. The technologic renovation is not only limited by the presentation of goods and services and its operation but also includes the recent renovations such as in areas of management, organization and finance.

Information Technologies at the level of macro-economy determined the level of development together with the power of competition of the region in the global market, while information technologies at the level of micro-economy became a means effecting all the procedures of strategic and administrative management and determining the power of competency (Buhalis, 1998). Before, IT was used to facilitate registration procedures and reduce the costs in hotel establishments; today IT is used to increase the service quality, the productivity of employees, and customer satisfaction by using the most advanced applications in advertising, marketing and communication. It is important for hoteliers to proactively incorporate IT into their efforts to improve service quality. An ongoing improvement of IT knowledge for all hotel employees can help to achieve this goal.(Law, 2005) For this reason the usage of information management and IT have a significant role in the success of hotel establishments.

ITs have many benefits for tourism. Some of these benefits are:(Aksu and Tarcan, 2002)

- increasing sales;
- diversification of goods and services;
- speedy responses to changes in market conditions;
- increase in service quality;
- increase in productivity and cash receipts;
- receiving information; and
- obtaining and evaluating feedback.

The requirement of collecting, storing and distributing large data for potential customers causes the hotel establishments to be the most important candidate for the usage of IT. It is also a must to spread this technology to every field. For this reason, IT shouldn't be perceived as only internet and marketing. The information technologies provide a noticeable competitive advantage in the applied fields. As in the other sectors, the necessity of understanding, interpreting and adopting technology directed the tourism establishments to build their own competition politics of this concept (Kimberley, 1995).

This study contains a research to determine how much of IT is used by the hotel establishments. It was conducted in İstanbul and in Antalya where the 5-star city and resort hotels were located. As a result of the study, the attitudes of the 5-star city and resort hotels towards IT, the differences between its usage areas and applications were analyzed.

2. THE USAGE AREAS OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN HOTEL ESTABLISHMENTS

The necessity of collecting, storing and distributing large amounts of information for their potential customers has made the tourism establishments an important candidate for the usage of IT. The heterogen structure of the establishments also shows differences from sector to sector, and from firm to firm within the sector with the usage of IT (Mutch,1995). Judy and Enz stated that the establishments using IT in their field of work will make their decisions rapidly with the assistance of IT and will easily reach their customers (Siguaw and Enz,1999).

The rapid development of the tourism supply and the demand have caused IT to become an indispensable partner of the tourism industry. For this reason IT plays an important role in tourism marketing, distribution, promotion and coordination (Buhalis, 1996). Collecting, storing and processing big amount of information provides a strategic competitive advantage for hotel establishments. Studies show that the luxury hotels give more importance to IT compared to the economic and middle-class hotels. It was found that the development of IT was at a higher level at the congress hotels, conference halls and/or centers and the casinos when compared other accommodation types. It was also found that the chain hotels have considered IT more than the independent hotels (Siguaw, Enz and Namasivayam, 2000).

The hotel groups are obliged to follow the other sectors as to the variety of products, growth in new markets, and the application of the marketing strategies in accordance with labeling. In this context, many strategies have been developed and implemented. The market complexity explained as the easiness and hardness of administrative environment is examined widely as a strategic obstacle. Thus, organizations try to decrease this complexity and increase the efficiency of their performance (Crichton and Edgar,1995)

The hotel establishments need a lot of information about their customers' purchase habits. Datawarehousing used for this purpose configures the center of the "Decision Support Systems" at lodging establishments and uses productivity analysis, administers the retirement funds, follows the employee performance related with customer satisfaction, creates new employment opportunities for new markets, and researches for equipment failure (Griffin,1998). Hotel establishments also concentrate on methods to satisfy their customers, provide high quality global services, concentrate on the administration of the work flow requiring specific methods (Caro, Guevara and Aguayo, 2000).

According to Siguaw, Enz and Namasivayam (2000), three strategic priorities, improving services, increasing labor productivity and income, are very important in the tourism industry. The usage of IT adopted to the lodging industry in

America and the existing applications confirm this strategy. The tourism establishments mainly depend on human capital that covers the knowledge, skills and abilities of the employees. The best way to obtain this is to increase the human capital to an utmost quality level by following a good administrative IT.

On one hand, many of the industry experts state that the lodging industry applications are the utmost information technologies and, on the other hand, the other industries follow the lodging establishments a lot further behind. A study conducted by Arthur Andersen revealed that less than half of the hotels in America have been widely practicing IT (Kasanava, Cahill and John,1992:194). These are usually big hotels and these hotel establishments use IT in every field of their operations successfully.

Traditional business hotels could have primary distribution channels: hotel direct, central reservation offices, and travel agencies. Recently, internet-enabled company web sites and various online travel agencies have become additional channels for hotel. Typically up to four systems are involved in processing booking request from these channels: global distribution system (GDS), switch system, central reservation system (CRS), and property management system (PMS) (Choi and Kimes, 2002)

One of the most important applications of IT used by the hotel establishments is the "Property Management System" (Kasanava, Cahill and John,1992:10). Although IT has many connections in the hotel system, this system is generally stated as front and back office connection activities. These are reservation management, room management, accounting management and general management (Kasanava and Brooks,1998:122).

The interfaces of the property management system include many different accounting procedures and the inside control functions to complete the procedures fast and properly. The energy management system, the electronic locking system, the electronic point of sales system, and the customer service system are among these interfaces (Kasanava and Cahill,1992:15). The important thing in the front office computer applications is the general management module that includes all the applications to provide the income analysis, the statistical applications and the financial analysis of the hotel (Azaltun,1999:12).

The hotel management systems developed by the hotel automation systems are very important for hotel establishments. According to a study conducted in 1998, related to the technology usage in hotels, the most popular system used by the hotel establishments is "Property Management System." For every hotel, the first five systems in rank order were; "Property Management System, Income/Profit Management System, Electronic Locking System, Food and Beverage Management System and Room Technology Management System (Akova,1999).

“Tourism Information System” used by hotel establishments has intranet and extranet applications. This system enables all the employees to reach information within the establishment and also enable the touristic information providers to reach different regions (Pröl, Retschitzegger and Wagner, 1998).

3. THE APPLICATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN HOTELS

In information economy, customer oriented service sectors have been gaining more importance (Block and Segey,1996). Hotel establishments use IT to: increase the productivity of employees, increase and develop service quality, increase and develop the satisfaction level of customers (Miller,1999:157). In relation to this, one of the factors of IT becoming a complementary part of the tourism industry is the increase in better service expectation of the customers to use developed products (Buhalis,2003:133).

Having well-equipped computer networks enables hotels to have a chance to get a profitable business travel market. According to a research conducted by Opinion Research Corp., 66% out of 300 tourists travelling as a business traveler continuously preferred the hotels providing well-equipped technology for their customers. Even 73% out of these people stated that there should be a faster internet connection in the hotels (Johnson,2000).

The hotels, considering the usage of IT, strive to develop some applications to satisfy their customers' other needs out of their rooms. To provide this, hotels try to have network connection in the conference halls, even in restaurants. For example, Sheraton Toronto provides internet connections in their restaurants for their customers to study or play gambling. Also through internet services, the hotel provides services for its customers to complete their own check out procedures and inform people about the physical structure of the hotel (where the health center, the restaurants are etc.) (Johnson,2000).

The recent application used in the hotel establishments is called “smart card.” The smart card applications are used for check-in and check-out procedures, as a room key and for other systems in the room (WTOBC,1999:136).

The other application is called “teleconference,” the communication system by remote stations through the telephone. Teleconference is a recent electronic meeting system appearing as a result of verification of the communication system with computers where also e-mail sharing is provided (Boone, Kurtz, Block and Judy,1997:52). The teleconference system used widely in the sector of conference and meeting by the tourism industry helps the groups located at various places to share the data by virtual media. It is a system where the customers reach the updated information through a group of network to conduct their meeting. This system enables the participants to check the seminar

programs, and even in some cases check data from their home offices (Sullivan,2002).

Kiosks are the devices consisting of a computer and a screen used by people in common usage areas to obtain information. Kiosks, look like a kind of automatic money machine, grant data to the user through a touch screen, voice and video (İnternet Sözlüğü, 2002). Hotel establishments use kiosks in their lobbies for sales-marketing support, as consumer information center, research center for advertisement purposes.

Interactive-TV provides fast service, check-out, room service, seminar channel, data channel, advertisement, housekeeping service, minibar, out of order reports, fire alarm, wake-up service, message, music and radio channels, and cinema (Interactive Hotel Systems,2002). Today, hotel establishments use interactive TV applications to meet their customers' demand, keep the quantity of staff and prevent leakage. Eventually the customers with such demands can reach the main service without any communication with the employees. This system also provides internet access through TV, e-mails and interactive video games. The hotel establishments provide interactive TV to satisfy the customers' demands and enable customers all recent developments and comforts.

4. AN APPLICATION TO DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCES AMONG THE USAGE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN CITY AND RESORT HOTELS

The purpose of this study is to identify how many of the information technologies were used by city and resort hotels and the areas where these technologies are used. Within the scope of this study, 5-star city hotels in İstanbul, which is the biggest city of Turkey, and 5-star resort hotels in Antalya, which is the most tourist receiving city of Turkey, were studied for comparison.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the survey method was used. Because of the low return rate of surveys conducted via fax and e-mail, questionnaires were distributed to the IT department representatives in the hotel establishments and were collected from them when completed. Apart for the demographic questions, the questionnaire consisted of 3 types of questions. These were to determine the differences among management systems, IT applications and their usage by the 5-star hotels located in İstanbul and Antalya in Turkey.

According to the results of the survey, comparative analysis were made to determine the differences among IT applications of the 5-star city and resort hotels located in İstanbul and Antalya.

One of the most affected industries by the development of IT during the economic development is the hospitality industry. The study was conducted in İstanbul where most of the city hotels were located and in Antalya where most of the resort hotels were located. The total number of 5-star hotels in Turkey was 215 according to the tourism statistics of 2002 (Ministry of Tourism,2003). Twenty out of twenty one 5-star hotels in İstanbul were reached and 52 out of 61 5-star hotels in Antalya were reached during the survey study.

The results of the questionnaires were evaluated by using the SPSS 10.0 statistic program. Cross tabulations, frequency distribution, likert type scale (definitely agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, definitely disagree) and t-tests were used for statistical evaluation. The reliability of the data was calculated by Cronbach Alpha degree and the alpha value was 0.8590. The alpha degree was very close to 1.00 value defined as complete reliability. It was accepted that the results of the survey were reliable.

6. RESULTS

When the management types of 5-star hotels located in İstanbul and Antalya are compared, the percentage of hotels in İstanbul depending on international hotel chains was more than the hotels in Antalya. While the percentage of international hotel establishments in Antalya was very low, the percentage of group and independent hotel establishments in Antalya was very high (see Table 1).

Table1-The Management Type of 5-Star Hotel Establishments in İstanbul and Antalya

Management Type	City	Number of Hotels (N)	Percentage (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
Franchising Chain Hotels	İstanbul	3	15	5	6.9
	Antalya	2	3.8		
International Chain Hotels	İstanbul	9	45	12	16.6
	Antalya	3	5.8		
Group Hotels	İstanbul	6	30	29	40.3
	Antalya	23	44.2		
Independent Hotels	İstanbul	2	10	26	36.2
	Antalya	24	46.2		
Total	İstanbul	20	100	72	100
	Antalya	52	100		

As seen in Table 2, there were significant differences in the IT applications at the 5-star hotel establishments in İstanbul and Antalya. IT applications in the hotel establishments in İstanbul, such as on-line reservation, intranet, energy

management system, teleconference system, extranet, electronic locking system, voice mail, smart card, interactive TV, kiosks were used more than the hotels in Antalya.

Table2 –The Applications of IT at the 5-Star Hotel Establishments in İstanbul and Antalya

Applications	City	N	%
Accounting/Back Office	İstanbul	20	100
	Antalya	52	100
On-line Reservation	İstanbul	20	100
	Antalya	26	50
Intranet	İstanbul	19	95
	Antalya	32	61.5
Energy Management System	İstanbul	15	75
	Antalya	23	44.2
Teleconferans System	İstanbul	12	60
	Antalya	12	23
Extranet	İstanbul	11	55
	Antalya	14	26.9
Electronic locking	İstanbul	9	45
	Antalya	16	30.7
Voice Mail	İstanbul	8	40
	Antalya	9	17.3
Smart Card	İstanbul	7	35
	Antalya	14	26.9
Interactive TV	İstanbul	6	30
	Antalya	12	23
Kiosk	İstanbul	5	25
	Antalya	5	9.6

Table 3 - The Results of T-Test Related to IT Usage

Variables	City	Average Value	Standart Deviation	F	P	T	P
1-Information Technologies Used by the Hotels Provide Competitive Advantage	Antalya İstanbul	2,2115 1,3500	1,1434 ,6708	6,538	,003	3,159 3,947	,002 ,000
2- IT Usage Increases the Customer Satisfaction to the Hih-ghest Level	Antalya İstanbul	2,4038 1,5000	1,1421 ,6070	13,914	,000	3,352 4,333	,001 ,000
3- IT Usage Increases Employee Productivity	Antalya İstanbul	1,9423 1,5000	,8725 ,6070	,600	,441	2,078 2,433	,041 ,019
4- The Development of IT Must be Followed Through the Applications of Competitor Hotels	Antalya İstanbul	3,8269 3,3500	,8794 ,9881	3,526	,065	1,991 1,890	,050 ,068
5-IT Should be Followed by the Technology Producer Firms	Antalya İstanbul	2,0192 2,2000	,9998 ,2362	,496	,484	-,677 -,660	,501 ,514
6- Because of the Usage of the Application of IT in the Hotels, the Employees Have to be Intensively Trained	Antalya İstanbul	1,7500 2,0000	,8372 ,9733	,172	,680	-1,084 -1,013	,282 ,319

Table 3 - The Results of T-Test Related to IT Usage (continue)							
Variables	City	Average Value	Standart Deviation	F	P	T	P
7-The Best Way to Develop IT is the Applications of Franchise Establishments	Antalya İstanbul	2,2885 3,7000	1,2261 1,3018	,283	,596	-4,464 -4,187	,000 ,000
8-The Usage of IT Increase the Costs	Antalya İstanbul	3,6346 3,4500	1,1207 1,4318	6,367	,014	,578 ,519	,595 ,608
9-The High Investment Requirements of IT Make IT Difficult to Follow Up the Recent Developments Fast and Properly	Antalya İstanbul	1,5769 2,8000	,7234 1,6092	58,465	,000	-4,464 -3,274	,000 ,003
10- On-line Reservation is the Least Preferable Among Other Reservations made by the Customers	Antalya İstanbul	1,9808 2,9500	1,1460 1,2344	1,091	,300	-3,147 -3,043	,244 ,073
11- The Distributions of Memorandum Within the Establishment Through Intranet Has a Positive Effect on Employee	Antalya İstanbul	3,8077 1,9000	7,1812 1,4603	1,330	,253	1,174 1,826	,002 ,005
12- The Hotel Customers Can Easily Access Internet in Their Rooms	Antalya İstanbul	3,6731 2,1500	1,6887 1,4965	3,209	,078	3,532 3,729	,001 ,001

According to the results of the t-test, there were significant differences among the groups of the expressions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 as seen in Table 3. Respondents working in 5-star resort hotels in Antalya were more likely to be influenced by some variables than respondents working in 5-star city hotels in İstanbul ($P \leq 0,001$) including: "information technologies used by the hotels provide competitive advantage," "IT usage increases the customer satisfaction to the highest level," "the most important way to develop IT is the applications of franchise establishments," "the high investment requirements of IT make it difficult to follow up the recent developments fast and properly," "distribution of memorandum within the establishment through intranet has a positive effect on employees," "the hotel customers can easily access internet in their rooms," "on-line reservation is the least preferable among other reservations made by the customers," "IT usage increases employee productivity," and "the development of IT must be followed through the applications of competitor hotels."

The 5, 6 and 8th expressions did not have significant differences: "IT should be followed by the technology producer firms," "because of the usage of the application of IT in the hotels, the employees have to be intensively trained", and "the usage of IT increase the costs."

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study, the information technologies used by the 5-star city hotels located in İstanbul and the 5-star resort hotels located in Antalya were examined. Twelve out of 20 5-star hotel establishments in İstanbul were within the international chain hotel groups. These hotels were in a better condition compared to the other groups and independent hotels.

IT has a very important effect on improving the service quality in the hotel establishments where human resources are the main source of the production cycle. It was revealed that this importance of IT was well understood in the city hotels in İstanbul.

The general view of the resort hotel establishments was that their customers did not have so much expectation from IT. However, to provide communication to a global world, to improve the effectiveness of manpower and customers' services, the intensive usage of IT is required. It was identified that the hotel establishments in İstanbul took IT into account to increase their competitive advantages more than the hotels in Antalya.

The usage of IT was accepted as an important tool to improve the effectiveness of employees by the hotel establishments in İstanbul and the recent technologic

developments had been followed by them without considering the cost factor. The usage of IT also had a strategic importance for the hotel establishments in İstanbul. On the other hand, the hotel establishments in Antalya accepted IT as a cost factor and IT was not strategically important for them.

The 5-star hotels in İstanbul made an effort to form their IT policy by considering and interpreting it. The study revealed that the hotels in İstanbul were open to recent developments in respect to IT. As a result, it was identified that the importance of IT was well considered by the hotel enterprises in İstanbul when compared to the hotels in Antalya because of the reasons summarized below:

- The hotels mainly depend on human resources thus the knowledge, skills and abilities of their employees are very important for the success of the hotels. Because of the high employee turnover rate of seasonal hotels, IT's are not used effectively for employee education in seasonal hotels. It was found that because of seasonality, IT applications were not used widely in Antalya compared to the city hotels in İstanbul.
- While most of the 5-star hotels in İstanbul were the international chain hotels, most of the 5-star hotels in Antalya were mainly independent hotels. This study revealed that the chain hotels in İstanbul gave more importance to IT when compared to independent hotels in Antalya.
- The occupancy percentage in the 5-star resort hotels in Antalya during the high season (summer) reached up to 100%, but during the low season most of the resort hotels were closed. Thus seasonal hotels in Antalya don't want to make investments for IT's.
- The customer profiles of city and resort hotels also have some differences. The customers of the city hotels mostly stay for business purposes, while the resort hotel customers stay for vacation. Thus, the customers of the resort hotels in Antalya don't expect much from IT.

As seen from the results of the study, the 5-star resort hotels in Antalya were different from the 5-star city hotels in İstanbul due to their customer profiles, seasonal differences, marketing activities, competitors, etc. This study showed only IT applications of the 5-star hotels located in the two important tourism centers, İstanbul and Antalya. Thus, it showed only a limited number of the respondents' perceived responses on survey instruments.

Through different cross-tabulations and statistical analyses, it would be possible to investigate more relationships among variables, for example, similar surveys could also be conducted on different sample groups in other city and resort hotel establishments in Turkey or in other countries for comparative purposes.

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