

The Role of Marketing in Luxury Tourism: A Case Study on the Structures of Tourist Reception in Romania

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Abstract

Tourism is a pleasant and relaxing activity for people who choose to disconnect from daily activities to relax, visit other places and discover different cultures. As in the case of other types of goods or services, in the case of tourist services, some differences make them accessible to the general public or luxury, depending on the quality and experience offered. In the case of luxury tourism, however, things are different due to the types of beneficiaries and their perception. In this article, we aim to make a theoretical approach to the concepts of tourism, marketing in tourism and luxury tourism, followed by a case study conducted on official statistics in Romania on the types of accommodation available and the number of beneficiaries depending on the conditions offered. This will highlight the differences in demand on the Romanian market for luxury and medium tourist services and highlight the differences between Romanian tourists and foreign tourists who choose to spend their nights in Romania.

Key words: marketing tourism, luxury tourism, tourism services

J.E.L. Classification: M31

1. Introduction

Consumers are constantly changing in today's world of rapidly evolving technology and economic digitalization. Tourists are the first to arrive. This needs a continuous examination of marketing communication tools as well as a more efficient method of reaching out to customers. As media consumption has expanded in recent decades, the rate of change has accelerated. The change of applied communication techniques is influenced by public behavior, media consumption, level of engagement, and expectations (Gorlevskaya, 2016, pp.252-253). As tourism is part of a dynamic service sector that faces global competition and is characterized by continuous change, innovation has become crucial in creating and maintaining a competitive advantage. The ability to innovate is the potential to adapt and use new technologies for increased productivity and management. The innovations offer the possibility to extend the maturity stage of the life cycle of the tourist product. Therefore, they help maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and gain a long-term competitive advantage. However, new tourism products that offer unique value to customers are more successful than innovations, without rewarding customers and their involvement (Labanauskaitė, Fiore and Stašys, 2020, pp.1-6). They help maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and gain a long-term competitive advantage. However, new tourism products that offer unique value to customers are more successful than innovations, without rewarding customers and their involvement (Labanauskaitė, Fiore and Stašys, 2020, pp.1-6). They help maintain the competitiveness of the tourism product and gain a long-term competitive advantage. However, new tourism products that offer unique value to customers are more successful than innovations, without rewarding customers and their involvement (Labanauskaitė, Fiore and Stašys, 2020, pp.1-6).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Marketing communication in tourism

Tourism marketing opens a virtual communication channel between companies and those interested in them, regardless of whether they are part of the internal or external audience. Thus, starting with the marketing philosophy and marketing decisions adopted, tourism companies can define their product, the location in which they will operate, their specific audience, and their products' price, among other aspects. The concepts of marketing and market are linked because the exchanges that characterize marketing take place on the market: meet demand and supply. Although the market concept refers to a geographical location where sellers display their products and consumers negotiate and decide whether to buy, a more complex and detailed analysis based on economic concepts understands that the tourism market does not exist in a specific location. Lohmann and Panosso Netto, 2017, p.122).

Marketing communication is a vital aspect of the provision of tourism and hospitality services, as this sector largely depends on marketing due to the particular characteristics of the industry as a service (McCabe, 2009, p.2). Marketing communication nowadays entails more than simply "showing the brand" through advertising. It may be connected to other sorts of data and expanded to take into account marketing's larger strategic role in firms. Marketing communications may be defined as taking a "strategic approach" to all information that enters and exits a business - whether it comes from potential or present consumers, suppliers, shareholders, the general public, the media, or anybody else (McCabe, 2009, pp. 6-7). Rossiter, Percy and Bergkvist (2018) define marketing communication as represented by the messages placed by organizations in various transmission media to show, sell and position the brand in the minds of the target audience. In modern marketing communication, all the methods you can get in touch with potential and current customers are opportunities to communicate about your organization and brand.

Modern marketing activities carried out by tourism and hospitality companies show the dominance of the concept of integrated marketing communications. This concept provides for the planning of marketing communications based on the need to assess the strategic role played by each of its components (advertising, sales promotion, PR, individual sales, exhibitions, direct marketing) in the promotion strategy, as well as the search for the best a combination of them, ensuring the practical impact of communication programs for the promotion of a tourism and hotel brand (Hristoforova et al., 2019, p.830). However, due to its complexity, communicating the elements of a tourism product to the target audience is difficult. This allows for the practice of most types of tourism, implicitly addressing a large number of market segments with varying needs and degrees of sophistication in desires and preferences. Thus, based on a complicated purchase decision process, the aspects of the tourist product must be communicated through a huge number of promotional tools, all of which must be relevant to consumers and with whom they should be able to communicate at any time. For instance, to visit a location to the conclusion of the consumer act, which may include the purchase of souvenirs and promotional products, which might serve as an incentive to repeat the tourist experience (Stăncioiu et al., 2013, p.9).

Defining the target audience is essential for designing effective marketing communications (Gorlevskaya, 2016, p.253). Because it is impossible to reach the entire audience willing to consume a tourism product, travel companies use market segmentation to reach potential consumers more reliably and efficiently. Segmentation is a marketing strategy that divides consumers into segments and sub-segments, according to pre-established criteria, to optimize the resources available between demand and supply (Lohmann and Panosso Netto, 2017, p.122). Tourists, as final consumers, are the primary target audience. Their socio-demographic profile, needs, behaviour, expectations, media consumption, are the subject of regular marketing research to define future trends and perspectives. Behavioural segmentation is more important because not only can it define narrow segments, but it can also send accurate marketing communications. In addition, targeting digital devices has become more sophisticated.

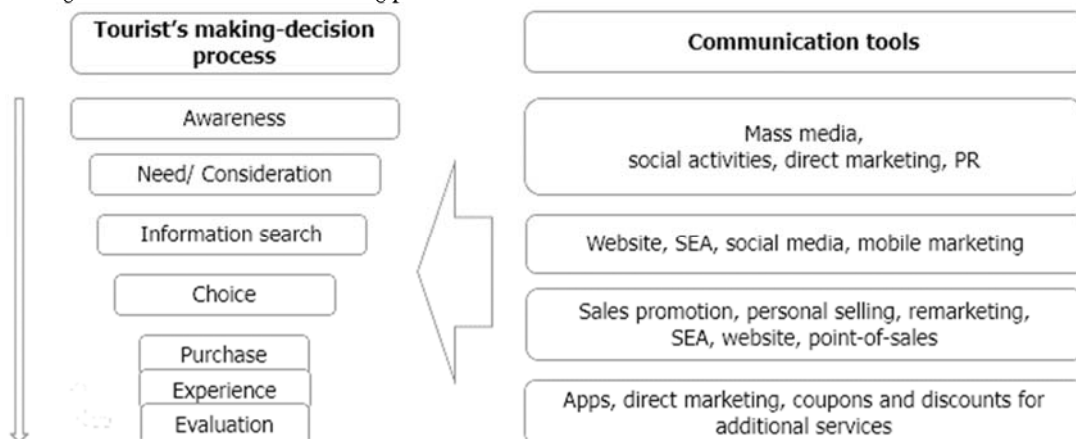
The implementation of different types of targeting, including behavioural targeting in digital devices, the integration of information in digital devices, has taken an essential step to cover the target audience and have increased the effectiveness of marketing communications (Gorlevskaya,

2016, pp.253-258). However, in order to further improve the efficiency of marketing communications in the tourism and hospitality industry, it is necessary to invest in new digital channels of communication with current and potential customers, build new types of relationships to discover new possibilities, and offer generous bonuses, for consumer attraction and to create autonomous and network communities to solidify the brand. The dynamic development of digital technologies and the Internet and the higher level of importance of high-quality information for the successful development of tourism and hotel activities make it possible to expand the range of information services and make them more efficient to build new types of relationships to discover new possibilities, to offer generous bonuses for attracting consumers and to create autonomous and network communities to solidify the brand. The dynamic development of digital technologies and the Internet and the higher level of importance of high-quality information for the successful development of tourism and hotel activities make it possible to expand the range of information services and make them more efficient. Furthermore, to build new types of relationships to discover new possibilities, offer generous bonuses for attracting consumers, and create autonomous and network communities to solidify the brand. The dynamic development of digital technologies and the Internet and the higher level of importance of high-quality information for the successful development of tourism and hotel activities make it possible to expand the range of information services and make them more efficient (Hristoforova et al., 2019, p.833).

According to McCabe (2009, p.4), the most important difficulty in marketing communication is that tourism is the archetypal "experience" consumer product, and this experiential service necessitates emphasizing the messaging in marketing that appeal to customers' emotions. Consumers are exposed to destinations through media coverage of news about places and events, which can be favorable or bad, and provides individuals an impression of the area and culture. Tourists are sometimes motivated by a desire to "see the globe" and discover new locations, thus there's a chance they won't be loyal to a destination or country, however this notion of tourist motivation is debatable. Tourist behavior patterns vary rapidly, and analyzing these patterns might reveal deeper societal morality and patterns of behavior or attitudes. Tourists' behavior is characterized by their desire to share their experiences with others; this is known as "word of mouth" communication, and it has long been acknowledged as the most widely utilized and trusted source of information that impacts tourist selections and consumer behavior.

As now shown in Figure 1, specialists can influence potential consumers through various communication tools. The Internet, mobile devices, wearable devices and other digital technologies meet the needs of consumers in terms of real-time information and communication. Consumers are always connected, using digital devices during the decision-making process and experience with the tourism product. Therefore, digital communication tools must always be considered during all stages (Gorlevskaya, 2016, pp.258-259).

Figure no. 1. The decision-making process and communication tools in tourism



Source: Gorlevskaya, 2016, p.258

Digital apps for the mobile, laptop, or computer user will increase the user's accessibility anywhere and at any time in today's digital era. Along with digital progress, apps provide a plethora of benefits. By combining numerous services with tour operators, tourism attraction managers, a range of services, and other tourism goods, information technology may also boost the productivity of a firm involved in the tourism sector. Each destination has a marketing communication plan to communicate its offerings to customers through marketing channels. Social media has evolved into a powerful tool for creating positive impressions and connections between businesses and their customers. Individuals' processes for gathering information in the decision-making process have been altered by information technology. The Internet and social media networks give information on a variety of tourist sites, including the tourist experience and images of the areas visited. Consumers develop application content, as opposed to the content of products and services prior to the information technology age, when products and services were mostly created by manufacturers (Nugroho, 2017, pp.387-390).

According to Gorlevskaya (2016, pp.260-263), the tourism industry uses existing communication tools, focusing on innovative ones, but the value of each tool differs in a mix of marketing communications. It is highly relevant to the tourism industry because tourists are always connected with devices, communication tools should all work together to promote tourism products. The most vital points of contact are the Internet, social networks, mobile and television. Therefore, innovative environments such as social networks, mobile, viral and augmented reality, portable devices, interactive videos play an essential role in the tourism industry.

Communication tools differ depending on the stages of the decision-making process and should accompany the target audience at each stage to stimulate progress. The effective combination of communication tools should be based on the company's objectives, target audience and competitive environment. To be successful players in the tourism industry, they should gain a competitive advantage through differentiation, using strong ideas, keeping abreast of new technologies. Therefore, solid ideas for the target audience, which accompanies and facilitates the decision-making process through relevant communication tools, are the right way to build effective marketing communication in tourism (Gorlevskaya, 2016, p.263).

So, as Hristoforova claims et al. (2019), the tourism and hospitality industry is a relevant sector that fulfils one of the leading functions in the global economy, ensuring the generation of a substantial share of the global gross product. This industry is expanding rapidly, and shortly, it will become one of the largest industries. Digital technologies in the marketing communications of tourism and hospitality companies will design new types of interactions with the public. Collective marketing methods in integrated marketing communications could be helpful, helping to solve problems comprehensively. A tourist and hotel product should be original and stand out, have a reasonable price and, most importantly, have positive reviews.

2.2. Introduction to luxury tourism: an approach to specialized literature

Luxury tourism is a distinct segment of the tourist business in terms of supply and, more importantly, demand. When it comes to places, the luxury vacation packages offered by the firms are rather consistent. However, there is a constant concern to satisfy the desires of tourists who want to spend their exclusive vacations in places that are usually only visited by celebrities, such as cosmopolitan cities, exotic islands, distant lands on other continents, or, on the other end of the spectrum, places untouched by people, such as desert islands, secluded beaches, lesser-known cities, unpolluted or with a unique history, such as desert islands, secluded beaches, lesser-known cities, unpolluted. Even though people's economic circumstances have been severe in recent years, they have been put to the test owing to job losses.

Luxury tourism opens a new field in which exclusivity and uniqueness will mean what is unexplored, untouched, which not everyone can reach, far from the masses and with the ability to share unique experiences. This tourist will search for trips and emotional, experimental destinations and, if possible, outside of Google search, moving away from what everyone wants and taking advantage of new trends that allow them to have little space to enjoy it (Alfredo Ledezma, 2017).

Luxury consumption has shifted from traditional luxury consumption based on status and product to a new experiential type of luxury that focuses on enriching the quality of life. In the contemporary world, it has been recognized that luxury experiences are superior to luxury products. (Yeoman and McHahon-Beattie, 2011. pp. 72-85).

The increase in consumption in general towards the consumption of experiences derives from the argument that, compared to material possessions, experiences are probably more closely linked to themselves and cannot be produced from person to person. Moreover, experiences improve well-being and create more lasting memories and hedonic values (Carter and Gilovch, 2010).

With the rise of luxury experiences, luxury has become more subjective and less visible, which means that, from a consumer perspective, a luxury no longer includes only extravagant products or experiences. Instead, luxury experiences can include experiences of time, space, authenticity, community, individuality, and well-being. Therefore, luxury has shifted from pure materialism to include experiences and aspirations and serves its interests more than status (Yeoman and McMahan-Beattie, 2018).

Luxury is ultimately associated with the joy of living, referring to pleasant feelings such as warmth, joy, fun and happiness. Therefore, luxury experiences are an opportunity to live different selves, reflected through symbolic consumption and indulgence in particular moments and through activities that can also be moments of harmony, self-enhancement and self-ascension (Hemetsberger et al., 2012, pp. 483-489).

Experiential luxuries include luxury travel, good dining and pampering services, which are common in tourist experiences. The basis of the growing luxury market is in luxury travel and is strongly driven by tourism spending. Even though luxury travel products, such as five-star resorts and cruises, attract a large number of tourists, luxury tourism is an under-researched segment. In addition, it is recognized that luxury is firmly attached to tourism because travel itself is seen as a luxury product, and tourism is allied to luxury (Correia, Kozak and Reis, 2014).

Correia, Kozak and Reis (2014) say that most of the meanings attached to luxury tourism are related to social status, which means that the higher a person's status, the less the status as a value will affect their holiday choices. In a study they conducted, the stars defined the luxury of tourism as being with their families in quiet, private resorts, where hedonic values predominate. However, ordinary people perceived it as a different, refined and exciting experience. This study provides an insight into how consumers view luxury tourism in the current democratized market.

From my point of view, luxury tourism represents, as in the case study stated above, a different experience at an expensive hotel with quality services and many facilities, activities and refined places that offer a different experience, thanks to the image created by the category of luxury that makes you think of expensive things that you are not used to frequenting. Although luxury brands nowadays also address the masses, offering more and more affordable products from a luxury brand, this cannot be applied to experiences. I find it harder to offer a more affordable luxury experience compared to a luxury brand garment. On the other hand, I also understand the approach of celebrities who have income and are used to luxury, but in the case of tourism for them, luxury is peace,

Luxury tourism is often defined by various hospitality products and services, from unusual landscapes, stunning cuisine and scenery to an integrated travel experience, possibly characterized by intimacy, space and experiences included in services from a foreign culture (Fox, 2011). It is traditionally associated with resorts with interiors and high-quality service structures. However, Uriely (2005) notes that the luxury travel segment is heterogeneous, and luxury tourism should be based on personalized services rather than ready-made packages represented by resorts.

Moreover, accommodation in luxury tourism may no longer have to be a five-star standard; instead, removing the location and personalizing the trip can make it a luxury vacation. The essence of a luxury vacation is about realizing a passion and escaping everyday life (Bakker, 2005).

Luxury contemporary travellers prefer real, unique, authentic experiences in new destinations, stimulating them physically and intellectually, adding notes to their lives. As luxury in tourism approaches a more discreet form of consumption, authenticity is a desirable value, meaning more profound and meaningful experiences. Therefore, luxury in tourism means enrichment, personal development and self-actualization (Yeoman, 2008).

Travel-related factors such as the purpose of the trip, the travel party and the ongoing experience influence the experience of consumers of luxury services. From the perspective of service providers, to successfully provide the best preconditions for a good customer experience, service providers need to understand customer needs and expectations. Companies can create circumstances only for the customer experience because the experience is felt inside the individual, and the result depends on how that individual, in a specific mood, reacts to the interaction in an organized event. With experiential luxury, the ultimate challenge for the luxury retailer is to maximize the luxury experience of consumers by designing products with features and attributes that create expectations of a luxury experience. A sense of luxury in luxury tourism comes from the cost of experience and time, which means a convenient and hassle-free experience that is unique and offers prestige or social status. In addition, quality and speciality that is not available to the masses are appreciated (Danziger, 2005).

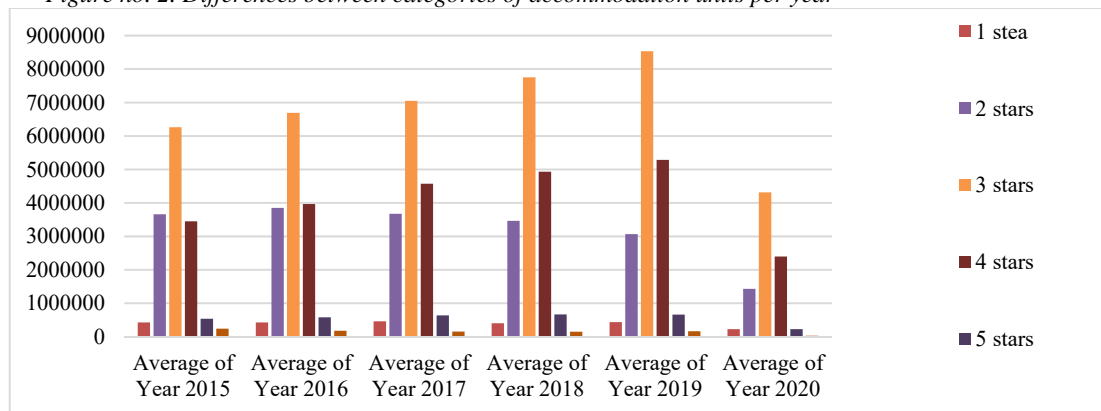
Previous studies have described signs or cues that evoke luxury primarily from a consumer perspective. Although, for example, in luxury restaurants, there has been a sense of luxury in price, the quality of food, services, the physical environment and the emotions it evoked, in the context of a luxury hotel, the physical environment and human interaction should be congruent for to evoke luxury expectations (Walls et al., 2011).

Thus, at the market level of tourism, there is a group of rich clients with adequate financial resources who are prepared to pay exorbitant sums of money for a vacation in order to outdo others in their social circle and spend their hard-earned money on relaxation and pampering. These people are typically between the ages of 25 and 55, have a high school diploma or higher, own a business or work in management positions in large corporations, earn an average monthly income of 1500-2000 euros, frequent exclusive locations, and are only interested in high-quality services for a very high standard of living. Given that they spend the most of their time at work and are responsible for both the company's and its workers' well-being, excellent partnerships are essential. Tourists who choose luxury tour packages believe that their hard work should be rewarded with expensive vacations during which they can spend the money they earned, receive celebrity treatment, receive high-quality services, and, most importantly, demonstrate their social status and demonstrate that they are successful and can enjoy all the benefits that come with it (Popescu and Olteanu, 2014, p. 320).

3. Research methodology and findings

In this article, a study was conducted on the official statistical data available in Romania on the number of Romanian and foreign tourists who choose accommodation units in the country. The analysis highlights (the purpose of the research) the occupancy rate of luxury accommodation units compared to affordable units. Among the objectives were also the identification of the number of tourists and their annual evolution and the determination of the differences between the Romanian tourists and the foreign tourists.

Figure no. 2. Differences between categories of accommodation units per year

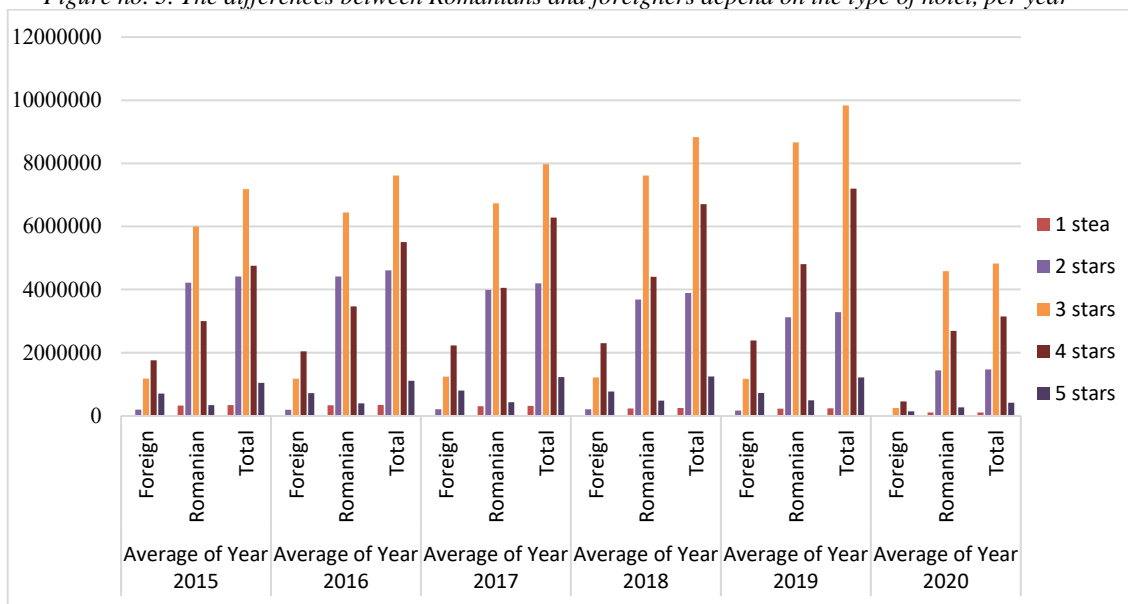


Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/> (graphic made by the author)

The figure with number 2 shows the distribution of accommodation categories by years and by the number of stars (quality indicator). It can be seen that the most used categories of accommodation were the average (accessible) 3 stars, on the 2nd place being still the four stars (high quality) and five stars (luxury/premium accommodation - superior quality). One of the conclusions drawn from this chart is that, as expected, there is a low demand for luxury tourism services in the Romanian market.

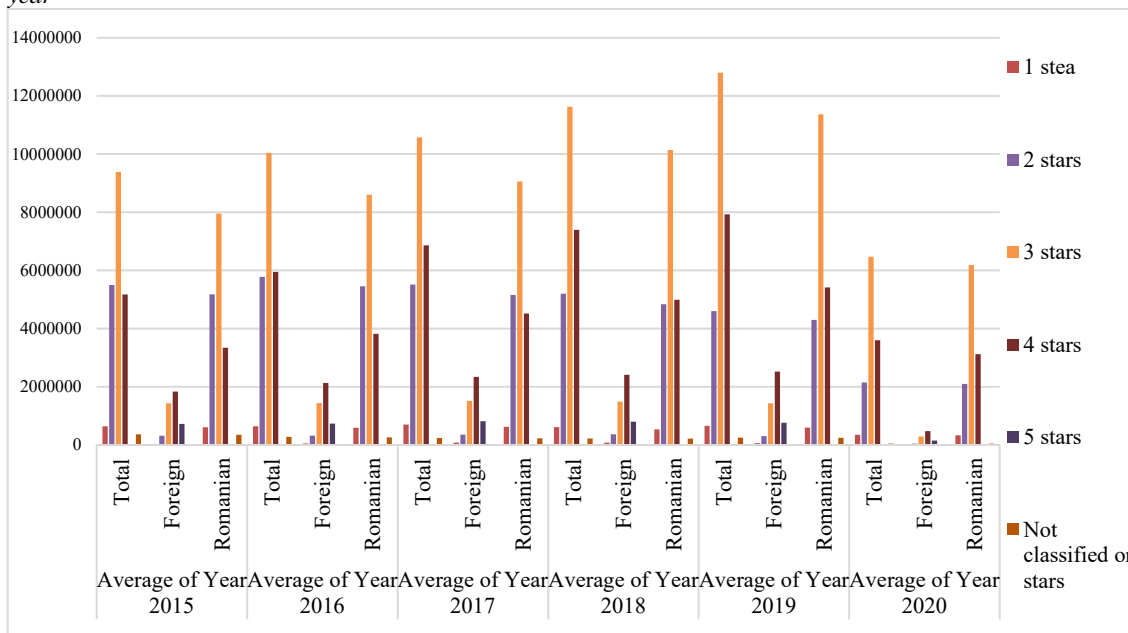
For this reason, we considered it interesting to compare the types of clients (Romanian and foreign) who benefited from tourist services in Romania.

Figure no. 3. The differences between Romanians and foreigners depend on the type of hotel, per year



Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/> (graphic made by the author)

Figure no. 4. Differences between Romanians and foreigners by categories of accommodation units per year

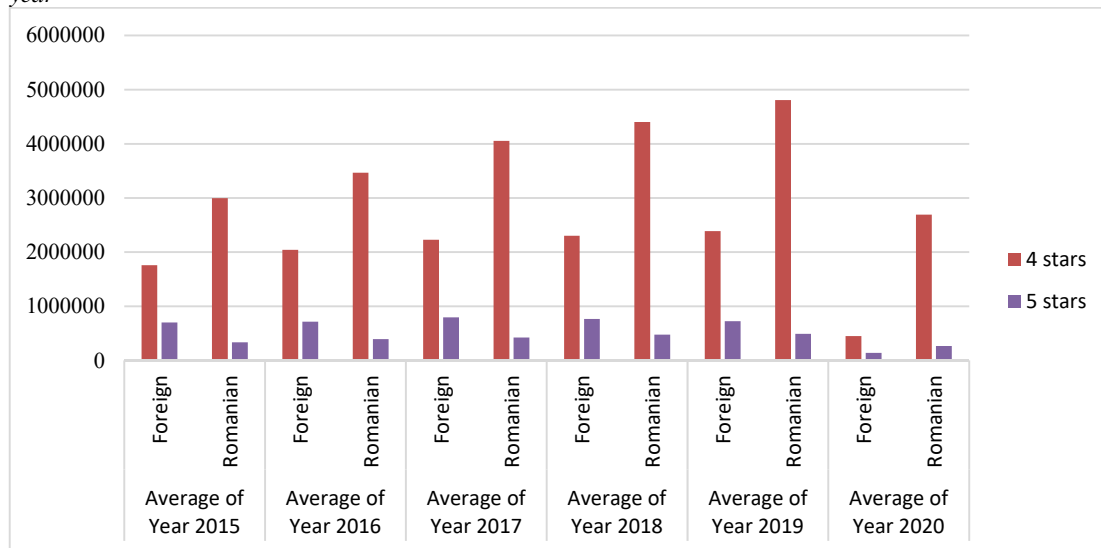


Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/> (graphic made by the author)

For this reason, we considered it interesting to compare the types of clients (Romanian and foreign) who have benefited from tourist services in Romania. Thus, the accommodation distributions were initially analyzed only for hotels (of 1,2,3,4 and 5 stars) (figure 3), and later all the accommodation units (hotels, motels, boarding houses, chalets and others) were included in the analysis. accommodation spaces) (figure 4).

It can be seen that analyzing only in terms of hotel quality, Romanians choose on average more nights of accommodation than foreigners in accommodation units in Romania. However, it is interesting that foreigners choose more luxury accommodation units (superior, 5-star hotels) than Romanians.

Figure no. 5. Differences between Romanians and foreigners by categories of accommodation units per year



Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro/> (graphic made by the author)

Because of the differences between the choices made by Romanian tourists and those made by foreign tourists in terms of luxury accommodation units (5 stars), we made a chart for those categories of accommodation units (Figure 5). Within the end with no. 5, it can be observed how foreign tourists choose in much larger numbers the accommodation units that offer luxury or high-quality services, compared to Romanian tourists.

4. Conclusions

Therefore, people in luxury tourism are looking for exclusivity, exotic or very remote places, less accessible to the general public. In this sense, travel agencies have specially prepared offers for people with higher incomes. Hotels and restaurants offer the most pleasant and exclusive experiences and services and create the most relaxing atmosphere and allow them to feel important.

We can thus conclude by saying that the demand on the Romanian market for luxury tourist services is not as high as on the international markets, the Romanians being more attracted by the accessible services (average costs). However, there is low demand from Romanian tourists for this type of service, but there is also a demand from foreign tourists, contributing significantly to improving the overall quality offered in accommodation units in Romania. Therefore, this study finds its utility in highlighting the types of demand of tourists, and secondly in creating an overall table on the tourist services in Romania, depending on their quality categories.

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