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## **Evaluation of quality determinants in web sites: Results from Greek & English outdoor recreation industry**

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### **Background**

The extended use of internet offers new opportunities of improvement customers' services and gaining competitive advantage by corresponding customers' requirements and needs through internet-based services (Khalifa, 2003). One of the primary goals for website quality is to explore the extent which a designed set of quality characteristics apply to internet user's needs. Also, web design has been recognised as a key factor for the acceptance and success of the websites and electronic commerce (Lin & Lee, 2006). Any improvement made on usability or in content of the website is believed that can increase sales, reduce customer service calls, and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Massey, Khatri & Montoya-Weiss, 2007).

### **Objectives**

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to evaluate the quality determinants such as content and usability characteristics of outdoor recreation industry web sites in Greece and UK, and (b) to investigate if any significant differences exist between Greek and UK outdoor recreation industry web sites and their quality determinants.

### **Methods**

For the purpose of the study 30 web sites with the highest frequency search appearance included for further evaluation. Each site was rated on a 43-item check list tool developed by Anderson, Allee, Grove and Hill (1999), covering content characteristics (authority, currency, information, scope, audience, value, accuracy & advertising) and usability (navigation, speed, access). The ranking scale of total score of check list was ranged from poor to excellent (0-25 = poor, 26-50 = average, 51-60 = average, 61-70 = good & 71-80 = excellent). Web sites were evaluated through observation method by two study authors and one research assistant with a specialisation in web

sites design. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each quality determinant and the two-tailed Mann-Whitney U was used to analyse differences between the non-parametric data of the groups.

## Results

From the total number of included web sites the majority (43.3%) scored at a good level of quality evaluation. The range ranking referred to the content characteristics was from 19 to 53, with 20% (n =6) having an average score of 45 and with 20% (n =6) having an average score of 53. The range ranking referred to the usability characteristics was from 9 to 27, with the majority 43.3% (n =13) having an average score of 23. Examining the possible differences between the two countries, Greek outdoor recreation industry web sites showed a lower total score ( $M = 58$ ), reporting an average level, than UK web sites ( $M = 67.2$ ), reporting a good level according to the ranking scale of the evaluation check list. More specific, in content characteristics Greek web sites scored lower ( $M = 39.53$ ) with a score range from 19 to 53, than UK ( $M = 44.6$ ) with a score range from 35 to 53. Moreover, in usability characteristics Greek web sites scored lower ( $M = 18.46$ ), with a score range from 9 to 27, than UK ( $M = 22.6$ ) with a score range from 17 to 27. The results also showed that there was a significant difference between Greek and UK web sites in two content characteristics: (a) accuracy ( $U = 60.0, p = .014$ ) and (b) advertising ( $U = 72.5, p = .040$ ), where Greek web sites score lower than UK ones in both content characteristics. Furthermore, the results pointed out that that there was a significant difference between Greek and UK web sites in one usability characteristic which was the navigation ( $U = 62.0, p = .027$ ), with Greek web sites score lower than UK ones.

## Conclusion/Application to practice

Considering that web site is an important tool, as it provides a supportive mean of notification and services promotion, has to gain increased attention from the outdoor recreation industry. Our evaluation procedure supported a lower quality level of web sites in Greek outdoor recreation industry, comparing to UK, which seems to be the result of significant omissions both in the content and usability characteristics. Giving an example of such an omission could be the fact that a large number of the Greek web sites showed an absence of sources cited or credited. In contrast, the majority of UK web sites appeared to be certified by national governing authorities such as A.A.L.A. (Adventures Activities Licensing Authority). The particular omissions create an environment in the user, which on one hand is not attractive and trustful, on the other hand does not develop completely the advantages of internet as a communication mean of promotion of their services. As organizations continue to expand their online service offerings, recreation managers / owners must recognize that the interface exists to serve the customers, so their design must be matched to the customer needs in terms of quality.

## References

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