

# Chapter 13

## Online Buyer Profiles in Rural Tourism

**Ines Djokic**

*Faculty of Economics, University of Novi Sad, Serbia*

**Nikola Milicevic**

*Faculty of Economics, University of Novi Sad, Serbia*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The services of rural tourism are increasingly offered and sold through online channel. This chapter researches socio-demographic profile of online buyers of rural tourism services. The process of knowing and understanding buyers starts with conducting marketing research and is followed by strategic and tactical marketing steps. The profile of buyers is the result of the process of market segmentation in which various variables are used, firstly as segmentation base and later as descriptors of identified segments. Field marketing research was conducted in Serbia. There were 300 respondents. Convenience sampling was used. Several variables in regard to buyers' relation to rural tourism services were considered from the aspect of their socio-demographic characteristics. The results show that these variables are useful for describing rural tourism services' online buyers. Furthermore, the recommendations for providers of such services were provided.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The process of knowing and understanding buyers starts with conducting marketing research and is followed by strategic and tactical marketing steps (Kotler, 2007). Among strategic marketing steps, there can be identified market segmentation, targeting and positioning, while tactical marketing refers to marketing mix. The profile of buyers results from the process of market segmentation in which various variables are used, firstly as segmentation base and later as descriptors of identified segments. The appropriate knowledge regarding buyers belongs to preconditions of performing all other listed steps within marketing management process. That, of course, does not suggest the lack of need for understanding all other actors of micro- and macro-environment.

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The services of rural tourism are increasingly offered and sold through online channel. However, there can be found different reasons while part of the buyers (in general) are still restrained regarding online sale. On the other hand, the reach of potential buyers, the possibilities of targeting, creative content creation and measuring marketing campaigns' effects are positive characteristics of digital marketing era.

Having all previously listed in mind, the topic of this paper is to research socio-demographic profile of online buyers of rural tourism services. By obtaining such information, it would be possible to be more successful in creating and maintaining relations with them. Thus, it would be able to increase the demand for such services.

Starting from the explained framework, following objectives are identified:

**The First Objective:** Define importance of online sale for rural tourism services market.

**The Second Objective:** Research determinants of buyers' acceptance of online sale.

**The Third Objective:** Explore the significance of buyers' socio-demographic variables for their acceptance of online sale.

**The Fourth Objective:** Conduct field research in Serbia regarding acceptance of rural tourism services from online channel in the context of buyers' socio-demographic characteristics.

**The Fifth Objective:** Identify recommendations for providers of rural tourism services.

**The Sixth Objective:** Identify scientific implications from the conducted research.

The paper is divided into several sections. Firstly, literature review is provided. After that, the settings of the conducted field research are described. That is followed by results, discussion regarding them and final remarks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of online channel in promoting further development of rural tourism services market is recognized, both in the literature and in the practise. As an illustration can be presented the work of Polo Peña et al. (2016) who consider the development of that market through identification of different segments and different online strategies toward them. They start from buyers' motives and identify several possibilities regarding the focus: experiencing the destination, enjoying the services and facilities, or having activity holidays. Consequently, different online strategies are suggested: founded on convenience and rural identity, on convenience and reputation, or on convenience, reputation, and rural identity, respectively.

As for the rural tourism itself, Lane and Kastenholz (2015) point out that there is an evolution within the concept within three phases. The first phase was related to the early 1970s. The main role of the tourism was to become a solution for rural space crises, and was supported by agriculture ministries, being named agrotourism or farm tourism.

The second phase of rural tourism development started appearing in the middle of 1980s. The main characteristics of that phase are (p. 1138): "the recognition of the importance by both the demand and supply sides of the enjoyment of experiences that are special to the countryside, and often special to villages and small towns in the countryside; the importance of personal contact with local people, a feature of particular value to small scale enterprises; the importance of physical activity and environment-people interaction in many of the activities; "accidental" informal partnerships between accommodation and

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