

# Challenges and sources of advertising in agritourism during the COVID-19 pandemic

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*A scientific paper*

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## **CHALLENGES AND SOURCES OF ADVERTISING IN AGRITOURISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **ABSTRACT**

*With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism market faces many challenges, including the Agritourism business. Because of the necessary measures introduced to reduce the spread of the virus, travel and tourist movements have been reduced. Therefore, agritourism is forced to focus its advertising methods on online sources to attract tourist demand for its facilities, products, and services. This paper explores the challenges agritourism has faced in promoting and advertising and how they have adapted to new digital and online advertising opportunities. The paper aims to identify new advertising challenges during the pandemic and analyze the importance of internet sales and security as the most significant attractive factor caused by the pandemic outbreak. The survey was conducted on a sample of 83 holders/owners of Agritourism in the Republic of Croatia. Through empirical research, respondents were offered questions in three thematic units: general data of objects, advertising methods, and content of posts. In order to meet the objectives of the paper, three hypotheses were given. The validation of hypotheses is processed using the statistical method of measurement known as the McNemar's test and descriptive statistics and analysis. The research results indicate the presence of advertising challenges in the new business conditions, the weaker representation of the use of traditional sources of advertising (while online advertising remains without significant changes), the under-representation of internet sales, and security, whose importance is recognized but under-promoted. The contribution of the work is reflected in the presentation of the trend of online advertising as an indispensable tool for attracting more visitors and tourists. At the same time, this topic notices the emergence of new requirements and ways of communication with tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.*

**Key words:** *advertising, Agritourism, COVID-19, tourism.*

### **1. Introduction**

The challenges of advertising nowadays have become more and more occupations for owners of economic operators, including owners of agritourism estates. Since agritourism primarily

implies agriculture as the primary activity and secondary tourism, it uses various advertising sources to improve the sale of agricultural products and promote the tourist activities offered on the agritourism estate. The challenges of meeting the increasingly demanding needs of modern tourists are becoming even more present in the business. Considering their motives and individual characteristics by age group, it is essential to direct and adapt advertising efforts to market segments. The challenges and the choice of advertising sources are becoming even more significant with the emergence of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic conditions with various epidemiological measures, primarily reflected in reducing physical contact, significantly affect the number of arrivals and overnight stays of visitors within the destination. With the reduced mobility of visitors, the influence is also present in generating revenue.

This paper aims to define and determine advertising concepts, specific forms of tourism, agritourism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and events in tourism under the influence of the pandemic. Finally, empirical research was carried out aimed at holders owners of agritourism farms to meet the work's objectives. Given that owners face imposed measures when doing business with the pandemic outbreak, it is doubtful how much effort they have to make when advertising to continue to attract tourist demand. Insight has been made into the most frequently used advertising sources and messages sent to potential visitors through empirical research.

The research goal is to identify new challenges and sources in advertising in terms of adapting to the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, analyze security as the most significant attractive factor caused by the pandemic outbreak, and determine the importance of internet sales. The results are presented and discussed through primary and secondary research, collection, and data processing. In order to test hypotheses, descriptive statistics and analysis methods and statistical methods of measurement of the McNemar test (bivariate statistics) were used, and the results are presented in the chapter materials and methods.

## 2. Advertising and tourism

With digitalization, new trends are emerging conditioned by tourist consumers that imply the availability of information from 0 to 24 hours. Therefore, advertising as part of the promotion mix implies offline and online tools. Offline tools are reflected in the classic mode of advertising using printed materials, TVs, radio stations, and the like. In contrast, online advertising sources lead to a new level of access to visitors. With the introduction of the Internet, communication has risen to a higher level, involves more participants, and results in more easily accessible and faster information. In addition to reaching the users themselves faster, the information also stimulates visitors' interest to visit the destination, buy products, and use the services. In this sense, advertising is "a paid, mass form of communication of specific content to inform, remind and encourage the potential buyer to take action concerning a particular idea, product or service" (Kesić, 2003:236). From the definition, it is possible to understand the elemental abundance that determines the term advertising:

1. paid form of promotion (to achieve communication and/or economic impacts),
2. non-personal presentation (using mass media to communicate with unknown recipients),
3. ideas, products and services, and the famous sender of the message.

By studying the concept of advertising, authors Richards and Curran (2002) state that there is no generally accepted definition. However, in the recent literature, advertising is defined as paid, own and intermediary communication that is activated through a recognizable brand to instantly or future encourage changes in consumer awareness (Kerr and Richards, 2020). Furthermore, Percy and Rosenbaum-Elliott (2021) view advertising as a means of directing

them towards a product or service by providing information or creating positive feelings (a higher level than focusing attention). Thus, the consumer's emphasis and attitude toward the product or service are visible in recent literature. In addition to the essential characteristics, the functions of advertising, according to Antolović and Harami (2015), are:

1. encouraging the desire to buy a particular product,
2. influence on changing habits and customs,
3. impact on the redistribution of consumption,
4. helping companies guide production,
5. stimulation of new techniques and technology.

Understanding of the advertising process, according to Kesić (2003), arises from complex and straightforward communication models. AIDA is one of the simpler models, which can be explained as getting attention, encouraging interest, arousing the desire, and taking action, buying, or accepting a particular product or service. Complex communication models imply a broader view of the communication process, including how the sender's thoughts are translated to the recipient in terms of whether the transmitted message is understandable and in the context of the intention for which it was sent.

Weber and Boranic (2000) state that the promotional plot consists of the following elements: advertising, personal sales, sales promotion, public relations, and publicity and direct (direct) marketing. Due to frequent intertwining, the concept of advertising and public relations is identified. However, they differ, as is evident from the characteristics shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The main differences between advertising and public relations

ADVERTISING	PUBLIC RELATIONS
A paid form of impersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, and services	A form of two-way communication is to establish a good reputation
Main goal – to transfer information about the offer to the target market and encourage the guest to choose the destination	Main goal – to achieve a positive image of a destination and attract the guests through dialogue
Disadvantages – impersonal, insufficiently convincing, even sometimes financially challenging	Activities: guest relations, fair organization, product launch, image creation, relations with sales intermediaries, creation of promotional materials
One-way communication	Two-way communication (supplier - guest)
Usage of different media: magazines, newspapers, television, radio.	Tools: publications, events, news.

*Source: Made by authors according to Jakovljević: Promotion of tourist destinations – advertising and (or) public relations? Acta turistica nova, Vol.6 No.1, 2012, p. 69-90*

Since tourism is closely related to humanistic functions, it is necessary to base it on the economic function and respect social developments and the trends they impose (Gavranović, 2015). The new approach to the guest implies expanded, enriched tourist facilities in the destination that make the most of free time (Gavranović, 2015). Bhagwat and DeBruine (2008) view advertising as a tool for making sales and profits in tourism and how a questionnaire can measure effective tourism advertising to examine image awareness and changes, relationships, and intentions to travel to a tourist destination. Advertising in tourism, according to Jakovljević (2012), is suitable for three reasons:

1. wider public coverage,
2. relatively simple communication and
3. flexibility.

Božić (2016) lists several tools used when communicating with a guest. Among the tools are e-mail and websites as the oldest source of internet communication and as newer social networks that are numerous and adapted to the same target group. Social networks include

Facebook, Instagram, Google +, Skype, Twitter, and LinkedIn. According to Gavranović (2015), social networks create virtual communities that impact services, products, companies, or individuals. Also, the role of social networks is reflected in the development of the economy and tourism. They achieve this by creating a new brand of the country (new image and emphasis on particular values), creating new attractive tourist offers for visitors, and appreciating cultural values promoted by tourism experts.

### 3. Mass tourism versus specific forms of tourism

The division of tourism can be explained according to various criteria such as the duration of the stay of tourists, the degree of mobility of tourism, the age structure of tourists, the national affiliations of tourists, the way of organizing travel, etc. (Čavlek et al., 2012). The complexity of the tourism division is due to various characteristics related to the weather, space, age of tourists, the market, and the like. The scientific and professional literature review shows the more frequent division of tourism into mass and alternative forms. Until recently, mass tourism, based on 3S (sun+sea+sand), was the basis of any tourist trip and a way to spend your vacation. However, in recent times, the aspiration of tourists has been directed in a different way of spending a holiday that involves gaining new experiences and achieving greater satisfaction than a classic holiday on the beaches. Characteristics, i.e., differences between these key terms, are reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The characteristics of massive and alternative forms of tourism

MASS TOURISM	ALTERNATIVE TOURISM
Fast development	Slow development
Maximization	Optimization
Socially and environmentally reckless and aggressive	Socially and environmentally responsible
Short-term	Long-term
Weak management	Local management
Unstable	Stable
Price-conscious	Value conscious
Quantitative	Qualitative
Growth focused	Development focused
Seasonal vacation	Off-seasonal vacation
Development of all locations	Development of appropriate places
Large groups	Individuals, families, small groups
Fixed programs	Tourist-focused programs
Comfortable, passive, demanding, and active vacations	Tourists decide how they want to spend their vacation

*Source: Made by authors according to Cuculeski, Petrovska, Petrovska Mircevska: Emerging trends in tourism: the need for alternative forms in Macedonian tourism, Skopje, 2015, p. 107*

Based on the presented characteristics, specific forms of tourism can be defined as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** The definitions of specific forms of tourism

YEAR/PAGE	AUTHORS	DEFINITION
1998, 457	Jadrešić	"A form of tourism which balances the processes of societal, cultural, natural, ecological, infrastructural and ecological factors, and in which a person becomes the origin, measure, and function of any touristic thought."
2001, 347	Vukonić and Čavlek	"A form of tourism motivated by different reasons, and the term intends to demonstrate a wide variety of activities and content that motivates people to go on vacation."

YEAR/PAGE	AUTHORS	DEFINITION
2011, 40	Čavlek	“A special group of tourist movements conditioned by a particular dominant tourist motive motivates a tourism consumer to travel to a destination whose tourist offer is adjusted for achieving the experience connected with the dominant interest of the consumer.
2015, 298	Vidak and Sindik	“Stands in opposition to the term of massive tourism, and relates to different travel types: educational, adventure, hiking, single travels.”

*Source: Authors*

According to Čavlak et al. (2011), there are two primary groups of specific forms of tourism depending on whether they are more related to natural or social resources:

1. Specific forms of tourism based on natural resources are health tourism, sports tourism, nautical tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, hunting and fishing tourism, naturism, Robinson tourism, and others.
2. Specific forms of tourism based on social resources are congress tourism (MICE tourism), cultural tourism, gastronomic and oenophile tourism, tourism events (event tourism), religious tourism, tourism at artificially created attractions, and casino tourism, and others.

Specific forms of tourism are viewed at a great distance from mass tourism, emphasizing adaptation to the specific wishes of modern visitors arising from personal interests and travel motives (Krcic Miodic, 2014). Today's modern tourist is increasingly distancing himself from mass tourism and is looking for his vacation and leisure in places not yet so well known on the global market and including peace, cleanliness, and security (Breslauer, Gregorić, Hegeduš, 2015). Specific forms of tourism are aimed at small groups and individuals who travel outside their usual destinations. Agritourism stands out as one of the specific forms of tourism.

### 3.1. Prerequisites for Agritourism in Croatia

Since the rural area occupies most of the Croatian territory, it is one of the opportunities to develop rural tourism. In addition, one of the prerequisites for the development of rural tourism is the rich natural and cultural heritage that makes a particular area authentic. Among other preconditions for development, rural tourism is based on numerous activities that complement the leisure time of the increasingly demanding tourist market. Such demand is characterized by modern tourists who: travel more and more often and go on shorter journeys, search for experience, strive for value for money, choose destinations with many amenities, are more environmentally conscious, and are active in open space. Many definitions of agritourism can be found in the available literature. Wicks and Merrett (2003) state that agritourism is a hybrid concept that includes agriculture and travel/tourism. As defined by the authors Yang, Cai, and Sliuzas (2010), agritourists decide to visit agritourism farms for pleasure, education, and/or active involvement in agricultural production and agricultural life. The connection with agricultural activity is also emphasized by Baćac (2011), who states that "agritourism exclusively relates to the type of tourism service complementary to an estate with active agricultural activity, within which products are sold that were produced, at the agritourism estate itself."

Further, Marques (2006, 151) defines agritourism as “a specific form of rural tourism where the host's house has to be integrated into the agricultural estate, making it possible for visitors to participate in agricultural or other complementary activities at the estate.” Franjić and Cunj (2007) present agritourism as an alternative form of tourism to mass tourism that is based on geographical features, traditions, culture, and local community customs. According to Barbieri (2013, 253), agritourism implies a “recreational, educational, or any other free-time

activity which is formed on a farm or any business facility connected with agriculture to attract visitors." Tubić (2019, 186) defines agritourism as an "emerging form of rural tourism which entails a temporary movement outside of the normal environment of the tourist's permanent residence. It involves short- and long-term visits to active or inactive agricultural, horticultural, or other similar business facilities in a rural environment with the goal of education and entertainment. In such facilities, the tourism offer complements agriculture as the primary activity by enriching it and creating higher value, and at the same time bringing many other benefits and possibilities of economic, socio-cultural, and ecological character to the owners, the local community, and the environment, while making it possible for tourists to gain unique experiences of agriculture and the everyday lives of the local population, and, in general, of the authentic rural area".

According to Trezner and Čorak (2014), tourism of special interests (in this context and agritourism) refers to the activities of tourists encouraged as a result of their hobbies, interests, and specifics of their profession. Agritourism demand, according to Zrakić, Grgić, Županac, and Guguć (2012), is exposed to several factors. We have the population, preferences, income, and similar on the demand side. In contrast, on the supply side, we have a location, destination distances, diversity of the offer, price, atmosphere, and hospitality of the hosts. Grgić, Zrakić, and Cerjak (2011, 49), according to Grgić (2008), characterize an agritourist as "a nature lover, a city dweller, a person fond of the village and old customs, an elderly person who prefers nature and healthy food or a person who wants peace." Tourism of special interests has a lower possibility of supplementation and therefore attracts less sensitive consumers, but also affects the prolongation of the season and the reduction of negative influences of the concentration of people on the coastal part.

Mesić and Cerjak (2015) suggest that service and product marketing are necessary for the successful operation of agritourism estates, whereby estates engaged in agritourism activities for many years are more likely to use classic forms of advertising than Internet marketing. Sudarić (2019) states that the online business of agritourism is necessary for participation in the global market, which, using new technologies, requires advertising predominantly through social networks. The research of Sudarić (2019) implies that agritourism is not sufficiently promoted online. However, online advertising is visible in better informing visitors about the services and products that a particular agritourism estate offers. Older age groups still under-monitor ads through online sources. In this aspect, the paper presents the relationship between advertising and agritourism and aims to strengthen online marketing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **4. Materials and methods**

Primary research was conducted as quantitative research using a survey as an instrument. The survey was conducted in August and September 2021 and aimed at agritourism estates on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. The questionnaire contained 16 open and closed questions to confirm or reject the three default hypotheses.

The survey was compiled using a Google Form, and 83 owners of agritourism estates participated in the survey. The questions are divided into three groups: general data on the data subject and agritourism estate, sources of advertising and the content of posts, and the possibility of online sales.

From the first set of questions and responses, it can be concluded that the average owner of an agritourism estate consists of a male of medium professional qualification, aged 41 to 60. The majority of respondents came from Dubrovnik-Neretva County (12%), followed by Bjelovar-Bilogora county (8.4%), Međimurje County (8.4%), and Varaždin County (8.4%). The majority of respondents (75.9%) have been engaged in agritourism for more than five years,



while the majority (17.7%) report about 11 years. Within the agritourism estate, the majority of respondents (50.6%) provide accommodation and food services, while to a slightly lesser extent, they provide only food services (38.6%) and only accommodation services (10.8%). From the above data collected, it can be concluded that accommodation facilities are less represented in the agritourism offer and agritourism offer mainly refers to food services. A positive result indicates that more than half of respondents offer both services: food and accommodation. Among the most outsourced services by the owners of agritourism estates, tasting rooms of domestic products stand out.

The default hypotheses for research purposes are:

H1: Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, security has become the primary tool/attribute of attracting visitors to the agritourism estate

H2: Social networks and websites are more resilient to the pandemic situation than other forms of advertising

H3: With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, owners of agritourism estates are introducing online sales of products and services

Explanation of the hypotheses given:

H1: The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has conditioned the observance of prescribed epidemiological measures to achieve the safety of all citizens of the Republic of Croatia and people in the world in general. At the same time, the measures are prescribed and valid for the performance of catering activities and thus affect the result of the development of tourist seasons.

H2: Conditional epidemiological measures reduce human contact. Since social networks and websites are accessible online, the assumption is that the owners of agritourism estates have opted for this way of communicating with guests and selling their products and services.

H3: Epidemiological measures aim to reduce physical contact, so sales of products are also limited, i.e., aimed at other channels such as online sales. It also applies to providing services, such as buy/charge accommodation services through various booking systems.

#### 4.1. Research results

In order to test the hypothesis "Safety gains more and more importance when attracting visitors to an agritourism estate," the following questions were asked:

3<sup>rd</sup> question group (question 1 - thesis 1): Security has become the primary tool/attribute for attracting visitors

3<sup>rd</sup> question group (question 1 - thesis 2): Your posts during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than usual, included the term 'security.'

Respondents could mark these theses with a score of 1 to 5, with a score of one implying the answer "I do not agree at all," a score of two "I disagree," a score of three "I neither agree nor agree," a score of four "I agree" and a score of five "I completely agree." The measurement of the hypothesis was done using descriptive statistics, the results of which are visible in the following Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6.

**Table 4:** Safety, as a factor of attractiveness

Statistics		
	Safety has become the primary tool/factor for attracting tourists	Advertising posts during the COVID-19 pandemic had more than usual involved the term "safety."
N	83	83
Valid	0	0
Missing	3,76	3,08
Mean	1,185	1,475
Std. Dev.		

Source: Authors

**Table 5:** Descriptive statistics for safety as a factor of attractiveness

<b>Safety has become the primary tool/factor for attracting tourists.</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Completely disagree	5	6,0	6,0	6,0
	Disagree	6	7,2	7,2	13,3
	Neither agree nor disagree	22	26,5	26,5	39,8
	Agree				
	Completely agree	21	25,3	25,3	65,1
Total		29	34,9	34,9	100,0
		83	100,0	100,0	

Source: Authors

**Table 6:** Usage of the term “safety” in advertising

<b>Advertising posts during the COVID-19 pandemic used the term "safety" more than usual.</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Completely disagree	19	22,9	22,9	22,9
	Disagree	11	13,3	13,3	36,1
	Neither agree nor disagree	15	18,1	18,1	54,2
	Agree				
	Completely agree	20	24,1	24,1	78,3
Total		18	21,7	21,7	100,0
		83	100,0	100,0	

Source: Authors

The results in Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 show that the H1 hypothesis is confirmed. It can be determined that security has become the primary tool/attribute for attracting visitors to the agritourism estate. Although the estate owners have not so intensively included it in their advertising, it is evident that most respondents (34.9%) fully agree with this thesis.

To confirm or reject the hypothesis that "Social networks and websites are more resilient to the pandemic situation than other forms of advertising," the authors used 2<sup>nd</sup> question set (question 1): Choose the media you used to advertise before the COVID-19 outbreak (possibly more answers) and 2<sup>nd</sup> group of questions (question 3): Choose the media you used to advertise during the COVID-19 pandemic (possibly more answers).

The measurement of the H2 hypothesis was done using the McNemar test comparing the use of social media for pre-and post-pandemic advertising. The additions are presented in Table 7, showing that almost all study participants have maintained their behavior in this regard, i.e., that the pandemic has not affected them. Only two participants changed their behavior, but one began to advertise on social media, and the other stopped doing so. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference ( $p=1.00$ ), that is, that the study participants did not start using social networks more often for advertising as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 55 (66.3%) out of 83 respondents use social networks for advertising purposes.

**Table 7:** Usage of social media advertising before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

Before the pandemic	During the pandemic		Total
	No	Yes	
No	27	1	28
Yes	1	54	55
Total	28	55	83

p=1,00

Source: Authors

The behavior changed by four participants, and the same number in both directions: two began to use the websites, and two stopped doing so. A total of 62 (74.7%) out of 83 respondents use the website for advertising purposes. The addendums are shown in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Usage of advertising on websites before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

Before the pandemic	During the pandemic		Total
	No	Yes	
No	19	2	21
Yes	2	60	62
Total	21	62	83

p=1,00

Source: Authors

If the data for other forms of advertising are compared, it can be seen that their frequency declined during the pandemic. Thus, brochures, leaflets, and posters are used much less frequently during the pandemic due to reduced physical contact and the inability to travel touristically. The 14 (35%) of the 40 people who used this form of advertising before the pandemic stopped doing so during the pandemic (Table 9).

**Table 9:** Usage of the brochure, leaflet, and poster advertising before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

Before the pandemic	During the pandemic		Total
	No	Yes	
No	41	2	43
Yes	14	26	40
Total	55	28	83

p=0,00

Source: Authors

When it comes to television, four out of nine people who used this type of advertising stopped doing so during the pandemic. There is no statistically significant difference in the change in this mode of promotion (p=0.13), as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10:** Usage of television advertising before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

Before the pandemic	During the pandemic		Total
	Ne	Da	
No	74	0	74
Yes	4	5	9
Total	78	5	83

p=0,13

Source: Authors

It is similar when using radio for promotion, although the behavior change ( $p=0.06$ ) cannot be confirmed with great certainty, as seen in Table 11.

**Table 11:** Usage of radio advertising before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

	During the pandemic		Total
	No	Yes	
Before the pandemic			
No	71	0	71
Yes	5	7	12
Total	76	7	83

$p=0,06$   
 Source: Authors

Furthermore, it can be concluded that there has been a statistically significant change in the use of newspapers as a way of promotion and advertising. A significantly higher number of respondents have stopped using traditional advertising than the number of respondents who have started using it (Table 12).

**Table 12:** Usage of advertorials before and after the pandemic (McNemar test)

	During the pandemic		Total
	No	Yes	
Before the pandemic			
No	67	2	69
Yes	10	4	14
Total	77	6	83

$p=0,04$   
 Source: Authors

Consequently, social networks and websites are not used more frequently for promotion than before the pandemic, but their use has remained stable. In contrast, brochures, leaflets, posters, and newspaper articles are used less frequently, and with radio and television, this is probably the case. In other words, online social networks and websites have proven to be significantly more resilient to a crisis such as the current pandemic than other advertising methods, so the H2 hypothesis is confirmed.

To confirm the hypothesis "With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, owners of agritourism estates prefer online sales of products and services," 3<sup>rd</sup> question set (question 2) was used: "Have you enabled/introduced a way to buy your products and services online (online) during the COVID-19 pandemic? (Through the order system and/or the interactive site on which the billing is also made)".

The measurement result is presented in the following Table 13, which shows that a minimal number of respondents (14 respondents - 16.9%) introduced online sales. However, when the answers "Yes" and "We have introduced this option before" are added up, it is still not exceeded at least half of the affirmative answers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the H3 hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 13:** Introduction of online shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic

Have you introduced online shopping of your products and services during the COVID-19 pandemic?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	YES	14	16,9	16,9	16,9
	NO	56	67,5	67,5	84,3
	We already had that	13	15,7	15,7	100,0

<b>Have you introduced online shopping of your products and services during the COVID-19 pandemic?</b>				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
possibility				
Total	83	100,0	100,0	

*Source: Authors*

## 5. Discussion

As one of the elements of the promotional mix, advertising plays a significant role in promoting agritourism products and services. Encouraging tourists to take action, i.e., coming to agritourism estates and buying certain services and products, is paramount today. In the age of technological development, advertising should be directed to carefully selected online advertising tools. In addition to technological developments and digitalization, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic focuses on online advertising and sales. Conditioned by the absence of physical contact, which through interpersonal communication was one of the main attractive factors of coming to agritourism estates, the estate owners are faced with new challenges and sources of advertising.

As a particular form of specific forms of tourism, agritourism is based primarily on agricultural activity and secondary on tourism activity. Its characteristics attract modern tourists to rural areas and generate revenue by selling services and domestic products. Since there is no generally accepted definition of agritourism, it can be described as a form of tourism closely related to people and the environment. It considers traditional features, implying certain activities and offering original products and services characteristic of a particular rural area in which it is located.

The survey conducted in 2017 by Matin shows that agritourism was not sufficiently promoted on the Internet, as per 83.2% of responses. The same survey states that online advertising is most effective through social networks, as confirmed by 73.3% of respondents. The research done by Sudarić in 2018, focused on online business in agritourism, aims to learn more about the promotion of agritourism estates online and the role of social networks in agritourism. The survey results indicate the Internet as the primary source of information about agritourism (43.6%), while television, radio, travel agencies, newspapers, and leaflets are less represented in advertising. As many as 73.3% of respondents said social media advertising is the most effective. In comparison, 83.2% of respondents believe that the offer of agritourism services and products should be promoted even more online. That the Internet is becoming increasingly popular as a source of information is evidenced by the TOMAS survey from 2019 (Croatian Tourist Board, available at: [https://www.htz.hr/sites/default/files/2020-10/TOMAS%20Hrvatska%202019\\_0.pdf](https://www.htz.hr/sites/default/files/2020-10/TOMAS%20Hrvatska%202019_0.pdf), accessed 12.10.2021). A significant increase in the number of tourists when using the Internet was observed year after year, especially in 2004, 2017, and 2019. Given that such growth is continuous, without falling, it is assumed that the demand for online information will continue to grow and those traditional ways of advertising will become increasingly neglected.

When comparing previous studies from respondents' perception, it can be concluded that agritourism is insufficiently promoted online. Also, insufficient promotion is visible through "classic advertising methods" such as radio, television, and printed materials. Therefore, the emphasis is placed on the Internet as the primary means of advertising, with social networks being singled out as the primary advertising tool. On the one hand, this is understandable given that today's world is surrounded by technology, and visitors are becoming increasingly technologically educated. However, on the other hand, market segments are still attached to the traditional advertising media. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain these sources of advertising.

Considering previous data from various studies can be compared with the research within this paper. Thus, the data are confirmed that internet usage is still current when collecting various tourist information and that websites and social networks are the most prevalent when choosing sources of information. Notwithstanding the current market crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Internet remains the number one spot when gathering information, while traditional advertising sources are becoming less and less represented and accessible.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper presents an overview of the current state of advertising on agritourism estates through the theoretical framework and empirical research. Regardless of market changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Internet is the most widely used source when informing tourists. Websites and social networks remain the primary tools when informing, while security becomes the main tool/attribute when attracting visitors to agritourism estates. Since the emergence of the pandemic conditions and new ways of doing business, it can be concluded that owners of agritourism estates did not engage in the introduction of online sales, which is certainly not good and not acceptable for the market in the age of digitization. A significant shortcoming in the operation of agritourism estates is also evident in the awareness that safety is essential, but it is not advertised enough. Namely, security advertising would better promote the entire agritourism estate and generate higher revenues from the sale of products and services. The impact of the pandemic, except in the reduced number of arrivals and overnight stays, is also evident in the reduced scope of the traditional way of advertising. As a result, specific market segments find it harder to get the necessary information about the agritourism estate.

Comprehensive analyses and conclusions can establish that owners of agritourism estates encounter new advertising challenges daily. The increasingly demanding tourist demand requires new efforts to be invested in advertising activities. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has inevitably changed the world and even established ways of doing business. It is a great responsibility for the owners of agritourism estates to quickly adapt to market conditions to successfully respond to new challenges, thus securing their market position and gaining a competitive advantage.

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