

# ANALYSIS OF THE MOST FREQUENT COMPLAINTS OF THE TOURISTS WHO RENT CARS AROUND THE WORLD, ESPECIALLY IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims at identifying the causes that make the tourists who use renting transport services in Europe, USA and Australia, become unsatisfied with the service. In particular, for Romania, we present an analysis of the questionnaires filled in online by the tourists who rented cars, identifying the complaints in several categories. It is essential for all companies that care about their image to identify the reasons generating complaints.*

**Key words:** *tourist, car rental, questionnaire, complaints.*

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is beyond all doubts one of the most important activities the modern person carries out, in a world that is developing faster and faster and that is generating more stress to individuals.

Therefore, tourism is the basic component in the recovery of individuals' physical and psychical abilities. Moreover, many companies that care about what they do and that can afford this, send their employees in vacations at the company's expense, hoping that when they get back, they will work better, and especially they will bring increased efficiency that will further add value to the company.

Transport and travel may be brought into discussion, leaving apart the tourism concept, but tourism cannot grow without travel. Transport is an integral part of the tourism industry. Basically, tourism

development is mainly due to transport development. The massive development of transportation means has led to the development of an entire economic network; for road transport, we can mention the development of gas stations, motels and other relaxation facilities networks for the tourist [4].

Transport is the first manifestation of touristic consumption and this is why its psychological impact on the tourist is crucial. In other words, the tourist is the first who comes into contact with the product he bought via the touristic transport service [11].

The last shall influence future insights of the tourist related to the other services making up the touristic product. Car rentals as part of the touristic transport service are a main component in tourism industry as more and more tourists use this service. The main reason for which more

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tourists use the car rental service is the increased mobility the car transport offers. Another advantage in this respect is also the wide and continuously growing development of road networks.

Nowadays it is impossible to think of a nice touristic destination that does not offer tourists access to car rental service. The operators are thriving to make enough cars available for tourists to cover the demand, but also to provide a wide choice of cars (sport cars, off-road, ecologic etc), to meet all requirements, but especially the natural needs of tourists.

Because client satisfaction is essential for a company to become successful and it represents the extent to which clients' expectations are met, is it crucial for car rental companies to apply a good practices code so that no client has the feeling that he was deceived at the end of the agreement. This will lead to a significant increase of client trust in the car rental industry which shall be reflected in the revenues of the companies in this field and in industry development.

A survey published by Hispacar, one of the biggest car rental companies in Spain, shows that 30% of the clients who rented cars were, one way or another, unsatisfied with the services they were offered [3]. Clients' complaints mainly referred to multiple the taxes they abusively had to pay. Many of these complaints are related to „full tank” policy for return or damages that are unreasonably charged to the clients, but some mistakes from the companies are also possible such as a type of „Take it or leave it” aggressive behaviour.

We must remember that many clients avoid complaining when they face certain inconveniences, especially when these are minor. They think their complaints will not result into modifications of service quality and, as a consequence, the time they might allocate to complaints would be wasted.

At their turn, many companies do not encourage clients to make complaints, thinking that the strategy of the ostrich with the head in the sand will bring benefits. The result of a survey by TARP indicated that 42% from the clients who had problems with a car rental company did not complain to anyone, not even to an employee of the rental company [5]. As a consequence, the best thing a company can do related to complaints is encouraging them, even asking their clients to do so. Giving the clients the opportunity to eliminate all frustrations before they are out of the door, they shall prevent in most cases further complaints they might submit somewhere else. This strategy may contribute significantly to the increase of the number of clients and implicitly of revenues, but it may also result into the loyalty of customers who had not been satisfied initially, but who felt the company really cared about their feelings and frustrations [5].

The papers will be handed on quality printing machine paper, of colour flat white, in the standard form described herein, printed by a quality printing machine on a single face of the page, and also in electronic format, identical with the printed copies.

## **2. Analysis of the Reasons behind Tourist Dissatisfaction Tourists in Europe, Australia and the USA**

The situation on three continents namely Europe, the USA and Australia was analysed in view of obtaining a global image on the manner in which rent a car clients perceive this service. Following the analysis, general complaints that are specific to this service and that appear in all analysed areas were noticed. This study especially aims at particular aspects by which a region differentiates from others.

### **2.1. Analysis of Complaints of Tourists who Rent Cars in Europe**

In Europe a dedicated institution was created with the purpose of helping and advising the citizens regarding their rights when they rent a car in a different country than the one they are residents of. This is called *European Consumer Centre (ECC Net)*. A trans-border analysis of this institution shows that one of the sectors where most problems for consumers occur is the one of short time car rental for private use, generally strongly connected with the tourism activity carried out by a person in a foreign country [6].

The study done by ECC concerns three major problems and those are: the situation of a foreign consumer to submit a complaint in a foreign country and hesitations that may appear (such as the linguistic barrier); current mechanisms dedicated to customer protection and the manner in which the European directives are contributing to the increase of consumer trust in trans-border agreements and the manner in which the rental activity can be regulated. Moreover, starting from the premise that if clients are well informed, this shall contribute to fewer complaints, a list of practical advice for consumers was put together such as to create a balance between them and the rental companies [6].

Many complaints forwarded by clients in Europe are related to the fact that car rental agencies abusively charge their credit card (more exactly the guarantee retained when renting a car) when the car is returned. The analysed complaints show that such additional taxes the companies charge are not accompanied by adequate explanations from the company and take the clients by surprise. Such practices are considered by the clients as unreasonable and unacceptable [6].

Moreover, the consumer protection

agency gets complaints from clients who faced difficulties the moment they tried to claim certain rights from big multinational companies because the rental was done in another country. Under these circumstances, it is unclear if the office that needs to handle the clients' request is the one in the client's country of residence or the one where the car was hired. As a consequence, the client is sent from one place to another, resulting into unwanted delays [6].

The Consumer Protection Office considers that car rental companies must facilitate the process by which the clients may ask for their rights, by facilitating communication with the office in the country of residence of the same company. It is true that, even though they belong to the same company, each office in a different country is, legally speaking, an independent company.

Directive 97/7/EC related to consumer protection for the agreements concluded at a distance mentions that articles 4, 5 and 6 and section 1 of article 7 do not apply in the case of service agreements. Article 8, related to credit card payment, stipulates that a client is entitled to cancel a payment if his/her card was used fraudulently, and member states must submit to such laws [6].

A special situation in Europe is in Ireland that faces a deficit of the car fleet available for rental. The fleet has around 10,000 cars, almost half less than the necessary for meeting the demand. Nearly 33% of the total of tourists in Ireland rent a car. The percentage grows to 42% if we speak of the total number of foreign tourists in North America [10].

The economic losses totally depend on the tourists' reaction to the car fleet deficit. There are tourists who accept alternative transport versions (positive situations), tourists who choose a touristic destination that can meet their demand (negative situation) or tourists who come by their own car.

The impact on tourist experience, negatively affected by car unavailability or too high rental costs leads to counter-advertising. The availability of a modern and flexible car fleet for rental is seen as a necessity for a developed touristic destination. One that aims at attracting first hand tourists, must be able to meet tourists' requirements.

The news regarding Ireland's problems may generate advantages for the competitors who can directly attack this vulnerability. „Word of mouth” advertising (either face to face or via Internet), may have a huge impact on a touristic destination; that is why it is extremely important that tourists leave a touristic destination in a satisfied manner; this is why it is extremely important for tourists to leave a touristic destination in a satisfied manner, so that they unintentionally turn into promoters of that destination. Otherwise, bigger losses may result, especially nowadays, considering the development of communication means and social networks, that can turn into propaganda means against (or a little bit more difficulty, in favour of) a certain destination.

On the market of car rentals in Romania there are both important foreign companies and local companies. This sector began to grow gradually starting with the late 1990s [7]. During summer the number of cars rented by Romanian or foreign tourists who travel for touristic purposes increases [7]. Most clients are foreign citizens, their average can reach even 95% from the total number of rented cars, according to *dailybusiness.ro*. This is also the reason rental companies periodically renew their fleets so they can face client demands [7].

## **2.2. Analysis of Complaints from Clients who Rent Cars in Australia**

The regulations in Australia in the field of car rentals are very clear and differ more

or less depending on the region. Thus, in Perth, the number of kilometres is pre-established before rental at 150 km/day. If the number of kilometres is exceeded, 0.25 \$/km shall be charged up to a maximum of 12.50 \$/day. Moreover, those who rent cars in Perth must be aware of the territorial limitations where they can go, that is from Kalbari to Albany. On the client's demand, such limitations may be extended, but for this to be possible, an insurance policy for accidents must be concluded [8]. The car must be returned at the agency during working hours or at the local airport, 24/24. Moreover, the tank of the car when handed back must be full otherwise additional fees are charged [3].

In Melbourne, all cars available for rental are insured. However, it is good to know that the insurance becomes void if the client drives in isolated regions, outside proper road infrastructure. The insurance covers a second driver for an additional fee of 5 \$/day. Only two drivers are accepted per contract [8].

All car rentals in Australia are done based on an agreement concluded between the company and the client. A special aspect is that many clients are taking pictures of the car to be able to prove if necessary that it was handed over in a good condition. Clients are recommended to write down the time the car was handed over and the name of the employee who received it. If the client is not satisfied, all car rental companies in all the states of Australia must make a feedback form available to him.

A recent study of Consumers Affairs reveals that a relatively low, but impossible to neglect number of clients submitted well-grounded complaints related to the fact that they were being overcharged by car rental companies without being informed about that.

Besides the complaints related to overcharging, there are also complaints

directly related to the quality of services provided by companies. Some clients complained that they were charged more for damages they were not responsible for. As a consequence, specialists recommend their clients to take pictures after taking over the car, at the same time with a detailed inspection of the car together with an inspector of the company. Thus, further conflicts that might emerge between the client and the company can be avoided.

Another frequent complaint refers to very high fines clients get for leaving the car in the airport or in another location. Car rental companies have fees of up to 23% for what they call car hand over in premium locations.

### 2.3. Analysis of the Situation of Complaints Made by Tourists who Rent Cars in the USA

The car rental market in the USA is dominated by the famous brands Avis, Hertz.

A few years ago, the experts were anticipating a 6% increase of the car rental market in the United States of America per year, mainly due to the number of foreign tourists who come and visit.

The biggest threat for the development of the sector is the decrease of the number of big companies renting cars to carry out their economic activities [1].

The complaints of the clients who rented cars in the United States of America are similar with the complaints registered in

other regions of the world, proving the fact that the problems the car rental sector faces are universal. Some clients complained about booking a certain car model in a certain date, and when they wanted to take over the car they were informed that that car was not available anymore and that they could choose another model [9].

Also, many clients accused the companies that they charge extra because the moment they hand the car over, they did not fill the tank to capacity, the clients saying that a small quantity was missing from the tank [9].

Another type of complaint refers to the damages clients cause, for which they took responsibility, but they pretend that the amounts requested as damages exceed a lot the costs for car reparations.

In Table 1 a brief situation of the complaints in the mentioned regions is presented.

### 3. Identification of the Main Reasons for Complaints in Romania

In order to obtain information regarding the reasons for complaints of the clients who rented cars from Romania (especially tourists abroad), the online questionnaires filled in by them on the portal with national coverage [www.eurocars.ro](http://www.eurocars.ro), after the tourists returned the cars were analysed. The companies that provided cars for rental via this portal were especially small and medium.

*Similarities and differences between different regions*

Table 1

	Europe	Australia	United States	Romania
Most frequent complaint	Overcharging	Overcharging	Overcharging	Condition of cars

The objective of the questionnaire consists in the identification of those aspects of the service provided by the company that led to clients' dissatisfaction,

so that the company focuses its attention and resources as efficiently as possible to correct deficiencies. 3002 questionnaires were analysed to identify those where

clients expressed their complaints in writing [5].

The average of each category of complaints is presented in Fig. 1.

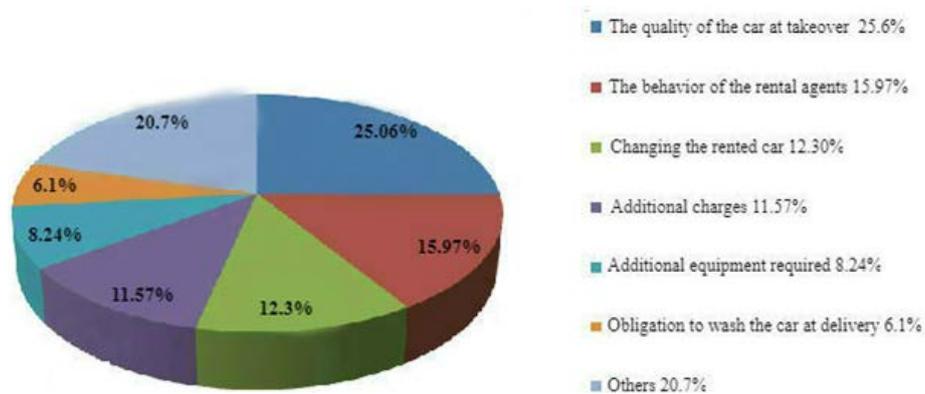


Fig.1. *Clients' complains by category*

Following the analysis of the questionnaires with complaints, a few groups of complaints were identified, as follows: 91 complaints related to the condition of the car when taken over (technical problems, cleaning), 58 complaints related to the employees' behaviour (position in relation with the customers, punctuality, training).

A number of 45 complaints were registered regarding the replacement of the car booked initially by the client (car replacement without talking to the client about that, offering a car of a different category than the one the client had requested or with a different engine power). Additional taxes requested to be paid by the clients added up to 42 complaints. Also 30 complaints were filed regarding additional equipment requested by clients (non-operating GPS systems or with maps that were not up to date, inappropriate chairs for children, defective audio systems).

Moreover, the clients made 22 complaints related to their obligation to wash the car before return. 75 questionnaires included various complaints that are not within the mentioned categories.

It has been noticed that the most frequent complaints are related to the technical condition of the rented car and its cleaning degree at the moment of the take-over.

As it results from Fig. 1, clients have also complained about other things such as: inappropriate equipment with tyres for a certain season, very deteriorated windscreen wipers that might impact the good operation of the car, cracked or broken windscreens. The absence of a spare wheel, the absence of windshield washer fluid, malfunctions of the lightening system, rental of some cars with too much mileage or other reasons for complaints.

More serious complaints were filed related to the braking system, problems with the steering or various strange noises generated by the engine.

The clients who complained about the cleaning of the car especially mentioned the bad maintenance of the upholstery, finding objects/waste belonging to previous clients, bad smell from smoking in the car and outside car cleaning condition.

Furthermore, most of the complaints directly referred to the personnel of the car rental companies. In this respect, the

biggest problem is that car rental agents are late a lot when they must wait for their clients in the airport (especially when renting cars with drivers) or, even worse, they are late when the car needs to be handed back and the clients almost miss their flight. Also related to the personnel, even though in most cases the behaviour of the car rental agents was a good one, there were also complaints related to the attitude and the behaviour of the personnel in relation to clients, or a non-professional attitude.

### 3.1. Determination of the Percentage of Dissatisfied Customers who will not Use the Services of the Company anymore

It is important to know the percentage of customers who were not pleased with the services they were provided and who shall not use the same company in the future in order to assess the possible losses of the company because such clients were not retained.

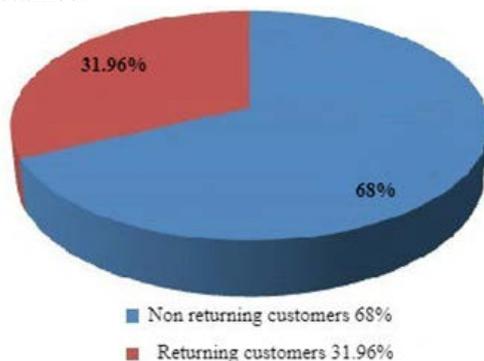


Fig. 2. Returning versus non- returning customers

From 363 clients who complained about the services of the company, 247 scored less than 3.5 for the question „Would you rent another car from Eurocars?“ Most probably, these clients will not use the services of the company anymore because of the problems they had. You can see the chart of the clients

who will not use the services of that company anymore in Figure 2.

## 4. Conclusions

From the analysis of the situation on the three continents mentioned above, it has been noticed that there are general reasons for satisfaction, specific complaints for a certain continent, and specific complaints for certain countries. In particular, for Romania it can be noticed that dissatisfied clients are in a relatively low percentage as compared to the total of clients. Nevertheless, they can also impact negatively upon the image of the company. In this sense, we can say that dissatisfied clients are more likely to display their feelings in public in comparison with satisfied clients. For instance, if a company has 1000 clients, of which 900 are satisfied and 100 dissatisfied, the opinions that may be expressed on the speciality sites may be as follows: 204 positive and 93 negative opinions. This might lead to the idea that 31% of the clients are unsatisfied, while the percentage is really 10%.

Taking into consideration this information, it is essential for all companies that care about their image to identify the reasons generating complaints. After identification, it is necessary to find solutions for diminishing the number of complaints. It is true that complaints cannot be removed totally and in this situation we need to take all possible measures for them to appear in an environment which is as much as possible isolated from the exterior, within the company. This can be done by encouraging complaints addressed directly to the company.

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