

The interest of Romanian consumers in using QR codes in restaurants and pubs

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Abstract: *The fast development of smartphone technology has created an opportunity to use QR code, considered a popular way of mobile tagging due to its ease of use. Various types of hospitality units, such as accommodations or restaurants and bars have found in QR codes an excellent marketing tool. This paper presents the results of a marketing research study conducted in Brasov city from Romania regarding the consumers' interest in using QR codes in restaurants and pubs. The results show that mostly the young generation of consumers is aware of QR codes existence because they have smartphones and they are always interested in testing the latest technologies.*

Key-words: *QR code, hospitality industry, marketing research, smartphone, promotion.*

1. Introduction

One of the mobile technologies that can be used in interactive marketing for advertising is the QR code (Quick Response Code). The major contribution of QR codes is on the promotion element from the marketing mix (Klein, 2014). Because customers scan a QR-Code only when they wish to get more information about a product or a service or to participate in a marketing campaign, QR-Code based marketing activities are classified under pull-based mobile marketing (Pousttchi and Wiedemann, 2007).

QR codes provide pertinent and relevant information and deliver it quickly and efficiently. QR codes are inexpensive to create and those that access them only need a camera-enabled smartphone in order to scan them (RestaurantQRcodes, 2016). Once they have been appropriately scanned with the help of a mobile application, they may give details about that business (allowing users to search for nearby locations), or details about the user, show a URL, or they may offer a coupon for shopping.

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It takes the marketing industry longer than expected to catch up with the QR code technology. Even though it takes only a few seconds to scan the code that leads customers to the product's website, very few customers actually scan the code (Cata et al, 2013).

The aim of this paper is to conduct an analysis of the utility of QR codes and their impact on consumers in restaurants and pubs in Brasov, a touristic city from Romania.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. QR codes use in hospitality industry

The QR code is a "matrix" code conceived and developed in the first place to be a symbol "easy to scan and interpret", formed from a number of black and white squares, defined officially as "modules", arranged in "grille" (Rouillard, 2008).

Although the adoption of this technology is slower than expected, marketers believe in the success of this innovation and try to incorporate the QR code into different mediums (Cata et al., 2013). Thanks to its "ease of use", "commodity" and "client oriented information", there are diverse possibilities to use QR codes (Ebner, 2008).

At their best, QR Codes can bridge the online and offline worlds, as a QR Code provides the possibility of integrating online content (a website) and offline content (a newspaper ad). For consumers, it means offering an exciting avenue of interactivity, engagement and exploration (Bisel, 2011).

Despite that, specialists have identified some limitations of using QR codes as a marketing instrument due to the following issues: end users' confusion on how to use QR codes, lack of uniformity of bar scanning apps, useless online content.

In hotels, the QR codes are used in "cards in the rooms, notices in elevators, at the concierge desk and message boards in the lobby to engage clients with tips on where to dine or what to do during their stay" (Landman, 2011). The code usually diverts guests "to the hotel website's blog which contains the latest events, restaurant tips, attractions and activity recommendations, our favourite shops, etc. From here the guest can also navigate to social media pages" (Landman, 2011). Another use of the QR code in hotels is to "use it as a promotional tool to offer a discount on drinks in the bar or dinner in the restaurant, and offer 10%-25% off during certain hours for those who scan it".

QR codes are used across the globe since they are practical and user-friendly, and they have gained great popularity in restaurants and other hospitality businesses (Behmen-Milicevic, 2017). QR codes are reshaping the way restaurants communicate with consumers.

2.2. Research methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives, the authors conducted an online survey, trying to identify the consumers' opinions on the efficiency of QR codes in gathering information about products and services in restaurants and pubs. The online environment was chosen for collecting the data based on the assumption that the majority of internet users are aware of QR codes.

The sampling method chosen is a mix between convenience sampling and snowball sampling. There were two simultaneous conditions for the respondents to be included in the sample:

(1) the respondents must have visited one restaurant/pub in Brasov city at least once;

(2) the respondents must be over 18 years old.

The survey was based on a questionnaire with 15 questions, created using the platform [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The link was distributed using the e-mail (275 invitations) and the social media network: Facebook.

The questionnaire was available for respondents to answer for 30 days, from January 10 to February 10, 2017. In the end, the sample consisted of 288 completed questionnaires.

3. Results and discussions

The main characteristics of the sample are related to gender, age and nationality. From all respondents, 61.9% are male, and 38.1% female. The predominant age group is 18-29 (68.05% of the respondents), followed by people aged 30-40 (30.2%). The next age group 41-55 represents 1.75% of the total. No respondents were declared to be 56+. One explanation for this fact could be that the seniors have been late adopters to the world of technology compared to their younger compatriots. Older adults face a number of hurdles when adopting new technology, such as physical conditions or health issues that make it difficult to use new technologies (Smith, 2014).

Regarding the respondents' nationality, statistics show that 75% of respondents are Romanian, and 25% are from other countries (Greece – 3.5%, Turkey – 3.5%, Germany – 6%, France – 7%, Austria – 5%).

The majority of the respondents (92.36%) said that they know what a QR code is. This is a very high percentage due to the respondents' age group and interest in technology.

Approximately 82% have scanned a QR code at least once, which gives an approximation of 1 in 8 people as users. From the statistics gathered, the researchers concluded that most of the respondents that know about the QR codes have also used them.

The scanning of QR codes comes from different reasons. From the respondent's answers, 33.85% of them are looking for discounts when scanning the code. The next reason is relevant information, this also accumulated 40% of responses, meaning that either they do not receive as much information as needed, or they look for more than it is already provided. One out of five respondents is looking for facts or tips regarding a certain matter, so also the information section is touched as well in this column, and it can be concluded that the information needed is not enough or relevant enough.

The remaining 6.15% of respondents answered "other", as their choice, but did not provide any information or insight to the matter, concluding that they have mixed feelings and ideas about the QR codes placed in restaurants and pubs.

From the respondents who have used QR codes until now, 13% say they haven't scanned it in pubs or restaurants. The main reasons for this were the lack of respondents' interest (40%) and the fact that they did not notice the QR codes (60%).

The main use of QR codes in restaurants and pubs in Brasov is because of curiosity, with a percentage of 48.3%, followed by the need of extra information (36%). The last category (15.7%) have scanned the QR codes because they usually do that (it is already a habit).

The usefulness of QR codes was ranked from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest value and 5 the highest one. Only 11.1% of respondents position QR codes at 1, thus making the experience unsatisfactory for them, the next level, 2 was also found to be in a percentage of 11.1%, referring to the low quality of information provided. Three points were given by 34.9% of respondents who found the information provided from the QR codes neutral.

A percentage of 15.8% of respondents ranked the QR codes with 4 points, as a satisfactory overall experience, placing the QR codes present in pubs/restaurants in Brasov on a good level of relevance, information provided, visibility etc. At the top level, with 5 points, 27.1% of respondents placed the QR codes on an excellent spot, as being reliable and useful for them. This makes us conclude that most people have an overall satisfactory position regarding QR codes placed in restaurants and pubs in Brasov. The types of information considered important by the customers who use to scan the QR codes is presented in the figure below.

Based on the responses, some recommendations could be made for restaurants and pubs. Daily Special is the information considered the most important by consumers (70%). Restaurant and pubs should use QR codes more because they are a practical way of displaying daily specials without needing to use paper for printing on a daily basis. The second information selected was about coupons (63%), so restaurants can create QR coupons that, when scanned, can reveal special discounts or offers.

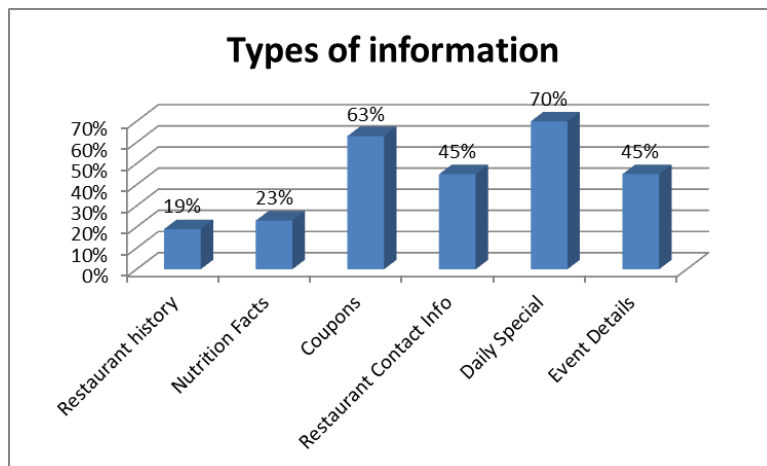


Fig.1. *Information needed by QR code scanning*

Restaurant Contact Info (mostly about the location) is useful for 45% of respondents. Restaurants can create a webpage that details their full contact information and includes a Google Map with directions to their place of business. By putting a QR code on flyers, newsletters or other marketing materials, consumers may scan the code and have full access to the restaurant's contact information and location. These QR codes can allow easy access to events, considering that 45% of respondents are interested in this information. Consumers can even download various calendars to their phones, ensuring they have the information needed to attend the event.

More restaurants should use QR codes to display nutrition facts so the consumers could make well-informed choices. The research results show that 23% of respondents need this information. Only 19% of respondents are interested in the restaurant's history, but this information should be displayed, too.

4. Conclusions

As consumer smartphone adoption continues to surge, QR code usage is becoming more sophisticated. In particular, QR codes are transforming from a mere advertising hook to an integral part of the mobile infrastructure. From boarding passes to takeout menus, the QR code is becoming less novelty and more utility. QR codes can engage customers much better than traditional printed advertisements. Thus, the QR Code enables markets to execute multichannel marketing and enrich their marketing efforts in an unmatched creative way (Handley, 2012). One challenge for restaurants is always staying fresh in the minds of consumers. The restaurant that embraces mobile technology intelligently will

demonstrate its cutting-edge commitment to excellent user experience and customer service.

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