CASE STUDY ON FRENCH, GREEK AND ROMANIAN HOTEL WEBSITES
- A COMPARATIVE APPROACH -

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ABSTRACT

Tourism develops rapidly and, in some countries, it is a priority for the Government. As a consequence, hotel companies develop too. The Internet and Internet technologies have become affordable and have deeply transformed the hotel industry. To be seen on the computer screens around the world and to be contacted easily, hotels make a lot of effort and spend huge amounts of money to build a solid image of their services. Websites seem to be the best ever known method of penetrating virtually any kind of target market. Thus, it is interesting to visit and observe hotel websites and find out how we can use this Web service of the Internet to inform ourselves in order to decide where to travel.

Keywords: website, website pages key features, comparative analysis, statistic analysis, hotel industry

1. INTRODUCTION

Let's suppose we want to visit a place/region of a certain country or go on vacation based *only* on the information given by a hotel website. It is a reality that certain people do this. The decision might come quickly, not only based on what was found, but in comparison with other offers.

Case study objective: to conduct research in order to find out the stage of developing *specific* pages/elements of websites for French, Greek and Romanian hotel organizations.

Case study methods: visits and analysis of 10 pages/elements of 10 hotel websites for each country from the following target hotel categories: two five-star hotels, two four-star hotels and six three-star hotels for each country. The hotel organizations were chosen randomly. All the pages/elements included in our case were visited and evaluated by 35 participants. The 35 sets of data were "placed" and analyzed (mean values, totals, diagrams, etc.) in Microsoft Excel, and the statistic analysis was conducted in Statgraphics.

2. FINDING HOTEL WEBSITES TO BE ANALYSED

To find websites for hotels in France we used the Google search engine from *http://www.google.com*. The first key word was Hotels, while the second was the name of the country – France. Among the results we took into consideration only the first choice where we could find 10 hotel names. Then, we had to search further for the hotel website address, because in all cases the hotel's name appears on sites being an intermediary between the hotel and its customers.

We repeated the same procedure for hotels from Greece and Romania.

We have to notice that sometimes it was very difficult to find the hotel website; this is because the intermediary organizations don't offer the hotel sites' addresses. Their promotion policies are very aggressive in order to make money from commissions.

3. HOTEL WEBSITE PAGES/ELEMENTS TO BE ANALYZED

As a general rule for any organization, a hotel website usually contains a very large number of web pages with many hyperlinks between them. The number of web pages is dependent on many parameters like hotel/chain dimension, target market, design team, management, promotion policies, location, costs, etc. There is no fixed number of pages per website, but, when surfing the Web, anybody can observe the existence of some "standard" pages.

For a hotel organization, these are the pages/elements worth considering:

1. **Accommodation** – containing details about the rooms and/or apartments, digital video clips and/or suggestive zoomed images to convince the visitor to make a virtual tour of the hotel.
2. **Restaurant** – providing the data about the restaurant affiliated to the hotel. Including the menu, prices and opening hours can make a good impression. Special offers and delicious products are to be mentioned separately.
3. **Tourist attractions** – developed according to database principles and showing the most attractive sites around the hotel/motel location. Hyperlinks, photos and digital videos are very welcome.
4. **Human Resources** – including brief biographies of key employees, in addition to a basic directory of current employees; It is designed according to database principles and can provide mail and e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers of staff members and possibly a photo of each person.
5. **FAQ** – providing a systematically developed list of clear and concise answers to frequently asked questions about the hotel's available products/services.
6. **Jobs** – indicating the company's employment policies, details of how to compose and send resumes (CV's), positions available, deadlines for applications, and contact persons. It might contain subsections designed according to database principles with information regarding job requirements. A feedback online form is highly desirable.
7. **Other information** – giving any other information not found in the other sections of the website. This can be developed according to database principles, completed with hyperlinks, photos and digital videos.
8. **Image archive** – storing important, interesting and suggestive images (historical and up-to-date) from inside the hotel and its vicinity. It might contain subsections designed according to database principles. A good idea is to offer the visitor the possibility of sending electronic postcards.
9. **Other** – an optional page or set of pages. Any hotel website should have a Guest book for recording the visitors' opinions and a separate section for VIP's. Graphics is a crucial aspect, and attractive colors are a determinant factor for the website visitor to continue visiting. The type of buttons, forms, animation and many other elements are "stealing" the visitors' attention and determine them to "stay" more than initially planned. These are some of the most difficult components to be taken into consideration when analyzing websites.

Our case study took into consideration only *specific* pages/elements containing the following key features:

1. **Welcome** – to make visitors feel welcome to the hotel website. It offers the hyperlinks that facilitate navigation in the sites' sections and the possibility of rapidly finding the information needed. This page should contain some original graphics/images able to illustrate the main message.
2. **About us** – to introduce the company's goals, strengths and strategies. It also provides information about the company's roots and background, and – very importantly – a message from the owner or the general manager.
3. **Contact information** – to provide information about the company location(s), a list of its main departments and a brief description of these. It is recommended to include mail and e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers, and contact persons for each department. Photos should be included too. A feedback form can help the hotel to get timely information from visitors to the site.
4. **Versions in foreign languages** – to facilitate the attraction of tourists from different countries or target markets. For countries with few speakers of their national language, versions in widely spoken languages like English, French, Spanish, German and Italian are recommended.
5. **Sitemap** – to let visitors view the entire site at a glance. It usually contains an image with active areas, with hyperlinks to related pages.
6. **Navigation** – to measure the personal perception of how easy it is to find information in the website structure. Being subjective, this perception may vary considerably from person to person.

7. ***Tourist Offer*** – to inform about the service packages offered and to provide details about them. In case of many possibilities, the page can be organized as a list with hyperlinks to pages with more detailed data. A database could also be very helpful.
8. ***Special services*** – to present services like swimming pool, tennis, fitness, aerobic, solarium, medical assistance, and all sorts of other outstanding services. It is the place where services can be promoted in order to differentiate the hotel/motel on the hospitality market.
9. ***Rates and tariffs*** – to specify the rack rates for rooms/apartments of all kinds, grouped on certain criteria. This page also specifies the prices for all the other services offered. Discount policies should be mentioned in a special section.
10. ***Online reservations*** – to provide a complex form containing many fields with validation buttons in order to be completed quickly and avoid incomplete data. Visitors can choose various channels to confirm the reservation (e-mail, phone, fax, etc.). It is one of the most important pages of the entire website.

The web pages listed above should contain valuable information for all kinds of visitors, especially for those willing to accommodate or make preparations for an event (conference, seminar, business presentation, wedding, etc.). In our case, we supposed that the 35 persons who participated in the case study were tourists willing to visit one country from Europe. The criterion for selecting this country is based on the points "obtained" by the 10 pages/elements of the hotel websites visited.

For our case analysis, first, we arranged all the sites visited and qualifiers (very poor, poor, good, very good, and excellent) in a spreadsheet file (Microsoft Excel). Then, a certain number of points were given for each qualifier: 1 for very poor, 2 for poor, 3 for good, 4 for very good, and 5 for excellent. If the site does not contain a specific page, the cell in the table has a "0" (zero) value. Finally, we calculated the mean values of the 35 sets of scores. The example of France is illustrated in fig. 1, and the results for each country are given in table 1, table 2, and table 3.

Hotel	Welcome	About Us	Contact Info	Foreign Languages	Sitemap	Navigation	Touristic Offer	Special Services	Rates and tariffs	Online Reservations	Total POINTS
5*	3.66	2.89	2.91	4.57	2.31	4.00	3.00	3.51	4.17	4.40	35.43
5*	3.23	2.46	3.23	4.89	1.74	3.46	3.37	2.49	3.89	4.23	32.97
4*	1.94	3.89	4.09	4.74	1.49	3.23	1.97	3.03	1.91	2.83	29.11
4*	1.66	2.46	3.80	2.34	1.46	3.49	0.46	1.17	4.20	3.49	24.51
3*	2.03	3.43	3.83	2.23	3.89	3.60	2.14	3.31	3.09	4.06	31.60
3*	3.17	2.97	3.03	2.17	1.49	3.29	2.97	3.51	4.29	3.91	30.80
3*	2.09	2.91	4.40	3.11	1.74	3.71	2.80	3.60	3.71	4.11	32.20
3*	3.71	3.00	4.20	3.49	1.26	3.60	1.23	3.00	3.94	3.09	30.51
3*	2.11	2.80	4.43	3.11	1.86	4.00	2.83	4.31	3.20	4.63	33.29
3*	2.69	3.46	4.11	4.06	1.74	3.83	2.80	3.97	3.40	4.31	34.37
Total	**26.29**	**30.26**	**38.03**	**34.71**	**18.97**	**36.20**	**23.57**	**31.91**	**35.80**	**39.06**	**314.80**

FIG. 1 – MEAN VALUES FOR HOTEL WEBSITE PAGES/ELEMENTS FROM FRANCE (MS. EXCEL)
(THERE ARE TWO SIMILAR SHEETS FOR HOTEL WEBSITES FROM GREECE AND ROMANIA)

TABLE 1 – MEAN VALUES FOR HOTEL WEBSITES PAGES/ELEMENTS FROM FRANCE

HOTEL	Welcome	About Us	Contact Information	Foreign Languages	Sitemap	Navigation	Tourist Offer	Special Services	Rates and tariffs	Online Re-servations	Total
5*	3.66	2.89	2.91	4.57	2.31	4.00	3.00	3.51	4.17	4.40	35.43
5*	3.23	2.46	3.23	4.89	1.74	3.46	3.37	2.49	3.89	4.23	32.97
4*	1.94	3.89	4.09	4.74	1.49	3.23	1.97	3.03	1.91	2.83	29.11
4*	1.66	2.46	3.80	2.34	1.46	3.49	0.46	1.17	4.20	3.49	24.51
3*	2.03	3.43	3.83	2.23	3.89	3.60	2.14	3.31	3.09	4.06	31.60
3*	3.17	2.97	3.03	2.17	1.49	3.29	2.97	3.51	4.29	3.91	30.80
3*	2.09	2.91	4.40	3.11	1.74	3.71	2.80	3.60	3.71	4.11	32.20
3*	3.71	3.00	4.20	3.49	1.26	3.60	1.23	3.00	3.94	3.09	30.51
3*	2.11	2.80	4.43	3.11	1.86	4.00	2.83	4.31	3.20	4.63	33.29
3*	2.69	3.46	4.11	4.06	1.74	3.83	2.80	3.97	3.40	4.31	34.37
Total	26.29	30.26	38.03	34.71	18.97	36.20	23.57	31.91	35.80	39.06	314.80

TABLE 2 – MEAN VALUES FOR HOTEL WEBSITES PAGES/ELEMENTS FROM GREECE

HOTEL	Welcome	About Us	Contact Information	Foreign Languages	Sitemap	Navigation	Tourist Offer	Special Services	Rates and tariffs	Online Re-servations	Total
5*	1.69	2.60	4.06	2.17	1.66	3.57	2.03	2.69	4.03	4.17	28.66
5*	1.37	2.17	3.60	1.83	1.43	3.31	1.51	2.23	3.26	3.80	24.51
4*	1.69	2.63	3.29	1.46	1.06	2.86	0.83	2.37	2.31	3.66	22.14
4*	3.40	3.00	3.34	3.46	0.97	3.43	1.00	1.43	1.06	3.43	24.51
3*	2.29	3.57	3.89	4.34	1.83	4.06	3.77	3.40	4.29	4.31	35.74
3*	3.51	3.29	4.00	1.69	1.69	3.86	2.17	2.86	4.26	4.09	31.40
3*	3.17	3.14	3.63	1.97	2.11	3.29	2.71	2.60	2.40	3.40	28.43
3*	4.20	3.37	3.26	1.94	1.97	3.94	1.43	3.86	2.17	3.89	30.03
3*	1.94	2.94	2.63	2.37	1.49	3.74	1.46	3.54	3.89	4.06	28.06
3*	2.71	3.60	3.60	1.74	1.51	4.09	2.26	4.43	1.17	1.80	26.91
Total	25.97	30.31	35.29	22.97	15.71	36.14	19.17	29.40	28.83	36.60	280.40

TABLE 3 – MEAN VALUES FOR HOTEL WEBSITES PAGES/ELEMENTS FROM ROMANIA

HOTEL	Welcome	About Us	Contact Information	Foreign Languages	Sitemap	Navigation	Tourist Offer	Special Services	Rates and tariffs	Online Re-servations	Total
5*	2.20	3.11	3.09	1.43	1.94	3.06	2.49	3.71	2.14	3.97	27.14
5*	2.00	2.80	4.03	2.14	4.11	3.86	3.20	2.97	2.77	3.69	31.57
4*	2.71	2.34	3.91	1.34	1.46	3.63	1.26	2.14	3.29	3.20	25.29
4*	1.54	3.69	3.83	1.51	0.94	3.63	0.69	3.37	3.63	4.29	27.11
3*	1.71	2.69	4.17	2.66	4.20	3.89	1.74	3.26	2.29	4.17	30.77
3*	1.97	3.86	4.26	2.63	1.46	3.57	3.54	3.34	4.03	3.94	32.60
3*	3.06	3.14	3.17	4.09	1.83	3.54	0.77	1.69	3.97	4.49	29.74
3*	2.97	2.29	2.29	1.46	0.89	3.09	0.69	1.77	2.86	4.06	22.34
3*	2.51	2.74	4.03	4.77	1.60	3.97	2.06	3.03	3.69	1.14	29.54
3*	1.31	1.80	2.66	1.23	1.00	2.51	0.57	1.06	3.34	3.74	19.23
Total	22.00	28.46	35.43	23.26	19.43	34.74	17.00	26.34	32.00	36.69	275.34

NOTE: The Microsoft Excel file containing the above data and related charts can be found on the personal website of Liciniu-Alexandru Kovács, at *www.geocities.com/liciniu/index.html* in the Research section. All sheet protections are without password. Anyone can download the file for free.

4. CONCLUSIONS

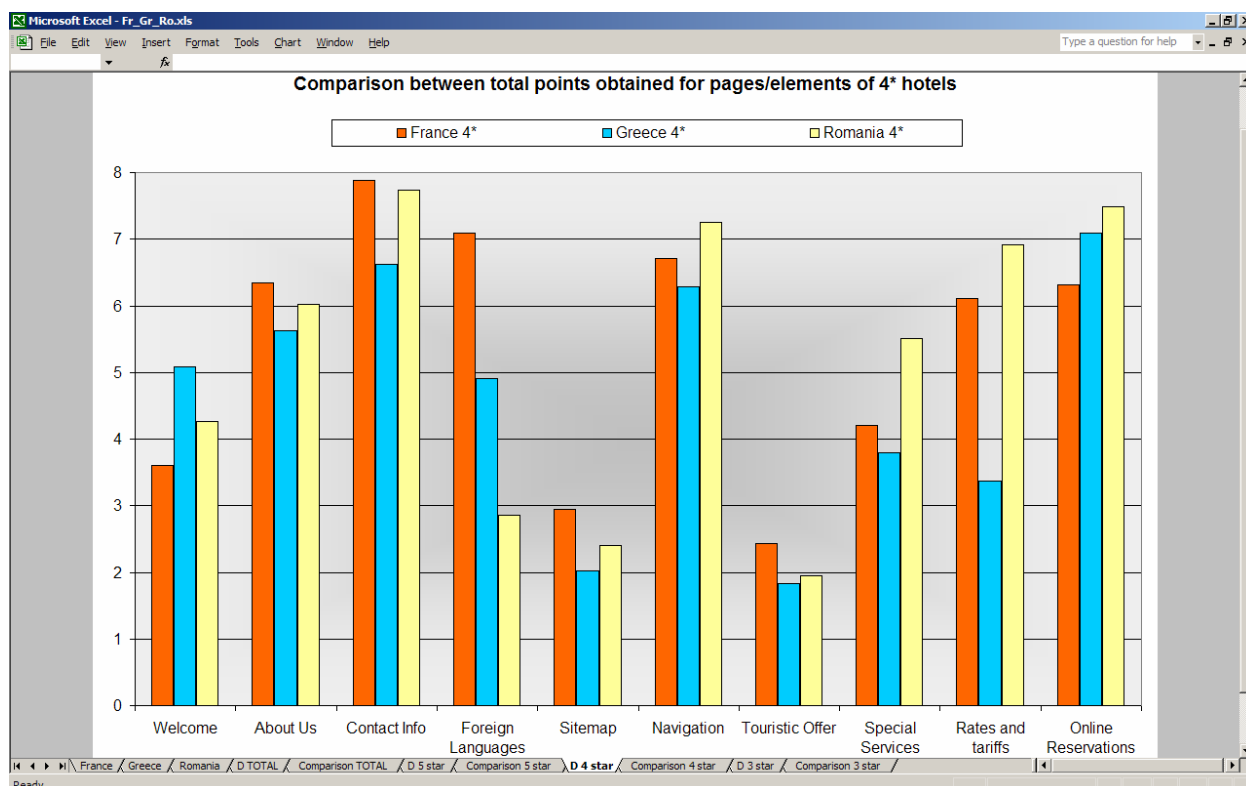**4.1 Conclusions for five-star hotels** (based on fig. 2)
1. In our study, France has obtained the best score in this category of hotels. More precisely, it has scored the highest in six out of ten sections analyzed. Major differences can be seen in the possibility of presenting information in more foreign languages than Greece and Romania and in the content of the *Welcome* pages.
2. Romania is on the second place with a difference of more than ten points. *About Us*, *Sitemap* and *Special Services* are the pages that are best evaluated in the websites of five-star hotels.
3. The websites of the Greek five-star hotels have obtained the minimum number of points; the single section that has received a higher score is *About Us*.
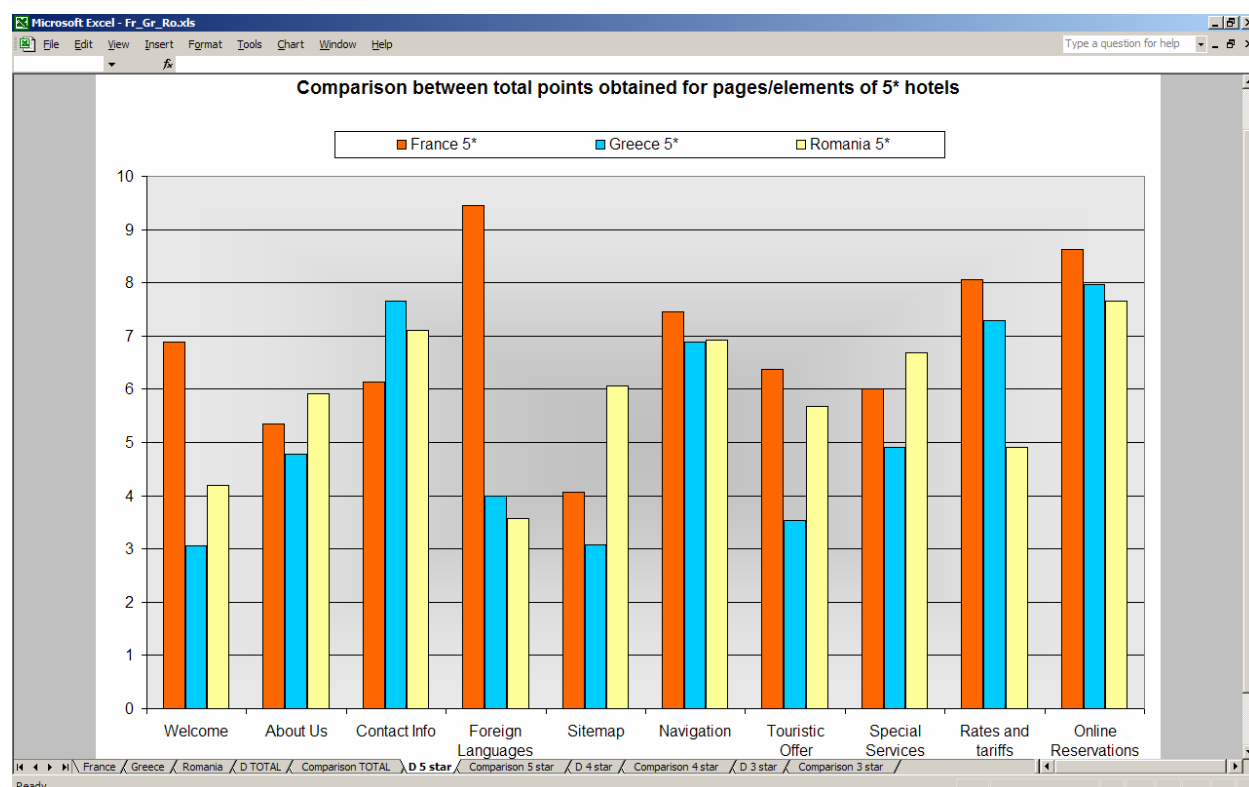
FIG. 2 – COMPARISON BETWEEN TOTAL POINTS FOR PAGES/ELEMENTS OF 5* HOTELS

4.2 Conclusions for four-star hotels (based on fig. 3)
1. We can see the same classification as in the case of five-star hotels: France on the first place, Romania on the second place, and Greece on the third place. This time the difference between the French hotels' score and Romanian hotels' score is smaller (1.23 points).
2. The Romanian sites are easier to navigate and have received most points for the sections *Special Services*, *Rates and Tariffs,* and *Online Reservations*.
3. Greece has been given the highest number of points in the evaluation of the *Welcome* pages.
4. With this category we can notice that the sections *Contact Info*, *Online Reservation* are positively evaluated in all the three countries and that the websites can be easily navigated. The *Tourist Offer* and *Sitemap* elements appear to be the weak points of the four-star hotels' websites in these countries.

FIG. 3 – COMPARISON BETWEEN TOTAL POINTS FOR PAGES/ELEMENTS OF 4* HOTELS

4.3 Conclusions for three-star hotels (based on fig. 4)

The situation is a little different in the case of the three-star hotels. The French hotels' websites manage to maintain themselves on the first place again. Greek hotels' websites are on the second place followed by Romanian hotels' websites.

Our analysis shows the following:
1. As you can see in the above figure, the scores obtained by the three-star hotel organisations in these three countries are close.
2. According to the 35 sets of data, Greek hotels' websites have three best sections: *About Us*, *Welcome* and *Navigation*.
3. Romanian websites have not received the maximum score for any of the sections.

4.4 Overall conclusions (based on fig. 5)
1. French hotels are best represented on the Web regardless of the category (3, 4, 5 stars). If someone chooses to visit France, Greece or Romania, or wants to go on vacation based *only* on the information given by a hotel website, then France should be the destination most tourists will choose because of the information offered on the Web.
2. Greek hotels, on the whole, are also well represented on the Web, although if we analyze each category the results are not so good.
3. The differences recorded between these three countries are not so significant on the whole, though there exists a considerable difference between France and the other two countries with the *Foreign Languages* and *Rates and Tariffs* sections (11.74 points, 6.97 points).
4. The Romanian hotels are the most poorly represented on the web. This could be because they are not aware of the importance of being well represented on the Web and therefore do not spend money on developing and improving websites.
5. The Internet in general and the Web service in particular can be used more intensively to promote hotels' offers and services.
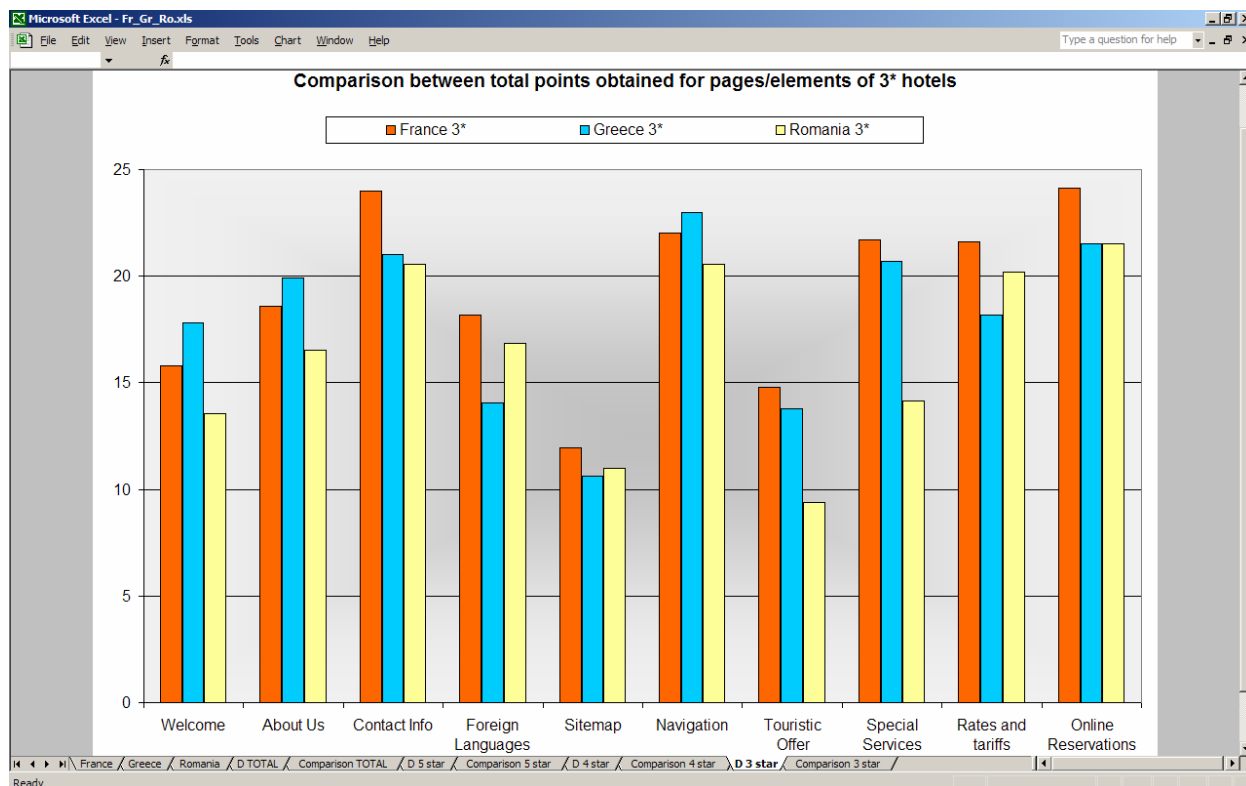
FIG. 4 – COMPARISON BETWEEN TOTAL POINTS FOR PAGES/ELEMENTS OF 3* HOTELS
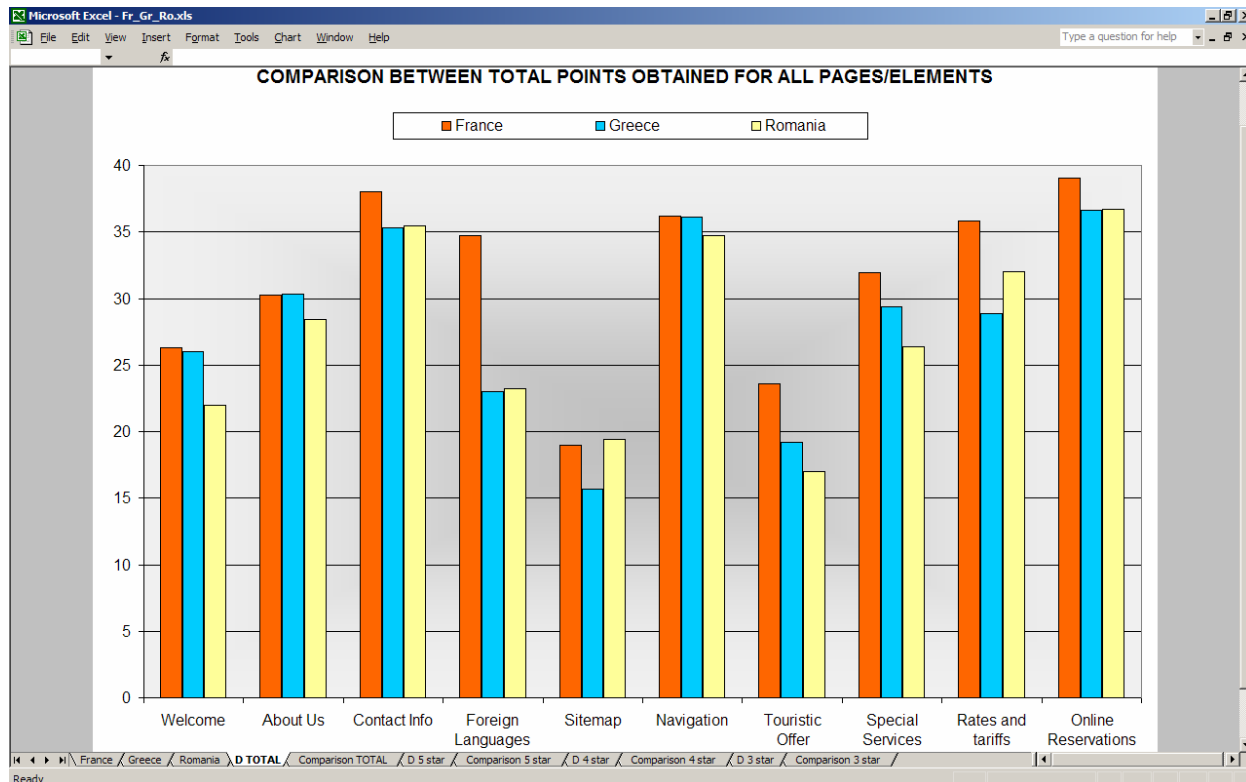
FIG. 5 – COMPARISON BETWEEN TOTAL POINTS OBTAINED FOR ALL PAGES/ELEMENTS

5. STATISTICS

Throughout this paper we have worked with the mean values. Statistically speaking, it is important to see if the mean values are representative or not. We have obtained the following average values for all the observations on each country:

Country	France	Greece	Romania
Average points	30.77	27.42	26.84
Coefficient of variation	27.22%	33.56%	34.42%

The values of the coefficient of variation show us that the mean values (average score) are representative for each country, so this study is correct from the statistical point of view.

As we have used just samples from each country, it is interesting to see some comparison of mean values for the entire population. Using again some statistical tools (ANOVA), we have observed that there exist considerable differences between France, on the one hand, and Greece and Romania, on the other hand, at a 95% significance level. It was interesting to observe that between Greece and Romania there are no important differences at (the same) 95% significance level.

NOTE: In order to obtain better results, one can increase the number of visitors who evaluate websites, or the number of visited websites for each country under consideration, and can use several Internet browsers (e.g. Opera, Mozilla, Konqueror, Netscape, FireFox, Hot Java Browser etc.) under different operating systems (e.g. Windows, Linux, Solaris, etc.).

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