

THE ROLE OF DIGITALIZATION IN RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF GARSON SOFTWARE

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Abstract: Rural tourism offers significant development opportunities in regions rich in natural and cultural resources. However, many rural tourism enterprises face challenges related to service quality, operational efficiency, and digital transformation. Hospitality software solutions, such as Garson, provide potential for modernizing operations. This study explores the application of Garson software in rural tourism businesses, focusing on its impact on management practices and operational efficiency. Following an analysis of Garson's use in local hotels and restaurants, the paper presents the results of a survey conducted with rural tourism business owners, who evaluated the software's effectiveness. The discussion also addresses the unique accounting needs and financial management challenges in rural enterprises. The findings highlight both the opportunities and challenges of adopting Garson software. The paper concludes with recommendations for leveraging digital tools to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of rural tourism businesses.

Key words: Digitalization, Garson software, Rural tourism, Rural tourist household, Business.

1. INTRODUCTION

The provision of tourist services in rural areas is becoming increasingly prominent in tourism and hospitality trends, particularly in the Republic of Serbia. Data from the E-Turist platform reveals that 816 households are currently involved in tourism-related activities. This represents a strong foundation for developing and promoting the implementation of Garson software within these households.

This study examines the potential use of Garson software in rural tourism enterprises, emphasizing its impact on improving management practices and operational efficiency. The research enhances the understanding of digital tools in the context of rural tourism and offers practical insights for businesses looking to adopt innovative solutions.

The paper is organized into several key sections. The literature review begins with an overview of rural tourism and hospitality, establishing the broader context for the study. This is followed by an in-depth examination of the Garson software, detailing its functionalities and applications. The discussion then focuses on the accounting specificities pertinent to rural businesses, emphasizing the distinctive financial management requirements that characterize this sector. The subsequent section presents an analysis of the usage of Garson among hoteliers and restaurateurs within the local geographical region, providing insights into its current implementation and the associated benefits. Finally, the paper presents the findings of a survey conducted with rural tourism households, which explores their perceptions of Garson's applicability and its potential to transform business operations within the rural tourism context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A rural area is typically defined as a region with a low population density, where agriculture is the primary occupation, and which is distinguished by its unique lifestyle, work practices, customs, and rural identity. Such areas provide opportunities for the development of rural tourism, including agritourism on agricultural farms and other tourism forms occurring in rural areas beyond agricultural

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economies. The offerings in rural tourism include facilities and services for catering, as well as the types of products and services provided to rural tourists [2].

At the agricultural holding level, agritourism is closely connected to the environment, agriculture, and local craftsmanship [10]. The core of agritourism is the rural tourist household, defined as a location or collection of sites that provide accommodation, food, and beverage services in a rural context, while incorporating elements that showcase the local culture and heritage [7]. Farm owners are generally the primary investors in agritourism, diversifying the range of products and services available. The revenue generated from agritourism often represents a substantial portion of the farm's overall income [9].

Rural development and rural tourism are frequently viewed as interconnected concepts. The provision of quality services and products in rural tourism plays a crucial role in advancing the development of rural areas and local communities [3], a process that can be further enhanced through digitalization.

Digitalization offers significant potential for rural areas [5]. It is essential to develop and implement new technologies to support digital tourism in tourist communities, as well as in underdeveloped, frontier, and remote areas [8].

Modern ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) have significantly transformed tourism. The importance of information systems in tourism and hospitality is deep and comprehensive, as these systems play a key role in modernizing and optimizing business processes in these dynamic and competitive sectors. Information systems in these fields not only improve operational efficiency but also significantly contribute to enhancing the customer experience, which is crucial for success in the service industry [1]. This section of the paper will focus on the Garson software and its components, which are key for the efficient management of hospitality operations.

The Garson Information System is a centralized software package that integrates various functionalities required for managing hospitality establishments, and enable the automation and optimization of processes in hospitality. Key features of the Garson information system include [4]:

- **Reservation management:** Allows the reception and tracking of table or room reservations, including the ability to accept online reservations and automatically update availability.
- **Order management:** Automatically receives orders from guests and sends them to the kitchen or bar, enabling faster processing and reducing the possibility of errors.
- **Billing management:** Displays and calculates costs, enables the creation of bills, and tracks payments.
- **Inventory tracking:** Helps manage stock and procurement, providing insight into inventory status and automatic alerts for replenishment.
- **Analytics and reporting:** Provides reports on performance, sales, expenses, and other key success indicators, enabling managers to make informed decisions.



Figure 1 – Visual representation of Garson

Garson software consists of various applications designed to meet the specific needs of hospitality establishments like reservation application, order application, inventory management application, reporting application. These applications increase productivity by automating and optimizing processes, reducing task completion time. They enhance customer experience through faster, more

accurate order and reservation processing. Additionally, they offer detailed analytics that provide valuable insights into performance and operations, helping identify areas for improvement [6].

The Garson POS (Point of Sale) system is a key component of the Garson software package used to manage transactions and interact with guests in real time. Key features of the Garson POS system include [4]:

- **Transaction processing:** Allows for quick and accurate calculation and billing of products and services. It includes options for card payments, cash, and other methods.
- **Sales tracking:** Collects sales data in real time, enabling trend tracking, identifying best-selling products, and analyzing performance.
- **Account management:** Enables the creation and management of guest accounts, including the ability to split bills.
- **Integration with other applications:** Connects with reservation, inventory, and reporting applications, providing a comprehensive view of operations.

The Garson POS system offers faster transaction processing, improving billing efficiency and reducing guest wait times. It increases accuracy by minimizing billing and payment errors. Additionally, it provides comprehensive sales insights, enabling analysis of sales data and optimization of offerings based on real-time information.

Garson software and its key components, including the Garson applications and POS system, provide a comprehensive tool for managing hospitality operations. The Garson system features an easy-to-use interface with a clear and organized menu display, allowing for easy item selection and quick order additions. It includes search and filtering functions to help users find products and information effortlessly. The interface is also customizable to meet specific business needs. The advantages include easy navigation, which simplifies staff training and task completion, an improved user experience through quick and intuitive operation, and enhanced efficiency by reducing task time and errors.

The Garson system covers essential daily operations, including order management, billing, inventory tracking, and employee management. It streamlines the ordering process by tracking order status and facilitating communication with the kitchen or bar. Additionally, it offers detailed reporting on sales, employee performance, consumption, and other key performance indicators.

Reports can be customized to meet various needs, such as daily, weekly, or monthly reports. Reports provide precise insights into the financial operations of the establishments. By analyzing these reports, trends are identified, which further enable the improvement and optimization of business processes and offerings. In addition to data related to material procurement, Garson allows you to record various types of additional expenses and enables precise tracking of payments and disbursements related to your accounts. With this kind of data tracking, you can generate high-quality reports that cross-reference income and expenses within the establishment. Garson comes with new reports for summarized overviews and analysis of various business parameters, carefully designed for owners and managers. All reports can be exported to Excel or accessed by other applications and programs within the system.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary aim of this study is to examine the application of Garson software within the tourism and hospitality sector. Initially, the research explores the role of hospitality information systems. In the second phase, the study focuses on rural households engaged in tourism, investigating their awareness of and adoption patterns regarding Garson software in their operations.

The research covered employees in the hospitality sector as well as guests and then included 62 rural tourist households selected on the basis of their active involvement in tourism activities. Data collection was carried out during the last quarter of 2024 using an online questionnaire.

To ensure robust data analysis, the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26 was employed. This software enabled the application of descriptive statistical methods to summarize

key findings. The respondents' views on the stated claims and their answers to the questions are presented in tabular form.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 – Presentation of survey results from employees and guests

Statement	ER	GR
The Garson software simplifies the ordering and payment procedure.	4.6	4.4
The Garson software reduces the time needed to process orders.	4.5	4.3
Using the Garson software reduces the need for physical interaction between staff.	4.0	4.1
The staff easily adapted to using the Garson software.	4.4	4.2
The Garson software reduces the number of errors when they ordering food and drinks.	4.2	3.9
The Garson software enables faster and more efficient communication between staff and the kitchen.	4.5	4.2
With the Garson software, staff can better track inventory (stock).	4.1	4.0
The features of the Garson software meet all the needs of our hospitality establishment.	4.3	3.9
The implementation of the Garson software has resulted in less staff workload.	4.1	4.3
The training for using the Garson software was adequate and allowed for quick acquisition of new skills.	4.5	4.2
The introduction of the Garson software has reduced the staff's workload during shifts.	4.2	4.1
Technical support for the Garson software is available and quick in case of issues.	4.0	4.2
The Garson software is easy to navigate and use, even for new employees.	4.5	3.8
The use of the Garson software has increased the overall productivity of the staff.	4.4	4.3
The Garson software allows for personalized service for guests (e.g., special orders).	4.1	4.2
The Garson software enables better tracking and management of table reservations.	4.0	4.0
The Garson software makes it easier to track guest bills in real time.	4.6	4.1
The Garson software provides accurate and useful reports on sales and operations.	4.5	4.1
Management uses data from the Garson software to make business decisions.	4.3	4.2
The Garson software reduces guest crowds and waiting times.	4.0	3.9

ER – Employee Results; GR – Guest Results

Based on the research, recommendations for improving hospitality information systems include developing an interface that enables faster task completion and reduces training time, adding features to enhance coordination between sectors like the kitchen, bar, and service area to minimize errors, integrating automation for inventory tracking, order management, and payment processing to reduce administrative tasks, and allowing greater customization to adapt the system to the unique needs of different hospitality establishments, making it more versatile and easier to implement in various environments. These recommendations aim to improve employee performance and increase overall efficiency in hospitality operations, which will result in greater guest satisfaction and, consequently, better business outcomes.

Table 2 – Presentation of results on the potential use of garson software in rural tourist households

Inquiry	F		%	
Do you think that digitization will make business operations easier for your household?	Yes	39	Yes	62.9
	No	3	No	4.8
	Maybe	20	Maybe	32.3
Do you think that digitization will enhance the business operations of your household, particularly in the economic sense, by saving time and reducing errors?	Yes	43	Yes	69.4
	No	2	No	3.2
	Maybe	17	Maybe	27.4
Have you encountered Garson software, or are you familiar with its functionality?	Yes	5	Yes	8.1
	No	57	No	91.9
Would you consider using Garson software in your household?	Yes	34	Yes	54.8
	No	1	No	1.6

	Maybe	27	Maybe	43.5
Would you be interested in receiving training on the use of Garson software?	Yes	51	Yes	82.3
	No	3	No	4.8
	Maybe	8	Maybe	12.9

F – Frequency

The data presented were collected from three regions within the Republic of Serbia: Vojvodina, Šumadija and Western Serbia, and Southern and Eastern Serbia. The largest number of rural tourist households (25) were surveyed from the Zaječar administrative district. The queries presented in Table 2 were tailored to suit the survey sample.

Based on the findings from the second part of the research, over 60% of business owners and/or employees reported that they believe digitization will facilitate the operations of their household businesses. Particularly noteworthy are the positive responses regarding the potential for digitization to improve household business performance, with a focus on economic efficiency, time savings, and error reduction. In relation to Garson software, only 8.1% of respondents indicated familiarity with the platform. However, more than half of the participants expressed a willingness to adopt Garson software within their household businesses. Furthermore, a substantial majority (82.3%) indicated an interest in receiving training on the use of Garson software.

Despite the numerous opportunities that digitalization presents for rural tourism, there remains a portion of individuals who view technology from a different perspective and exhibit reluctance toward its implementation. Given that rural areas are not fully developed, the adoption of new business practices requires both time and adequate support to be effectively integrated.

5. CONCLUSION

In the context of the current globalized economy and the growing integration of information technology, the tourism and hospitality sector is undergoing significant transformation. Developed nations demonstrate a higher level of acceptance of this technology's adoption within tourism, a trend that can also be observed in the tourism sector of rural regions in Serbia.

The study investigated the application of Garson software within the hotel industry and affirmed its potential significance for rural tourist households. Furthermore, the research emphasized the benefits that this software can bring to the operations of tourism-related entities, particularly in rural settings. The results revealed notably favorable outcomes, particularly in terms of streamlining the operations of rural tourist households.

The integration of Garson software into tourism in general, but also with a focus on rural tourism, represents a promising development for enhancing the operational efficiency and competitiveness of rural tourist households. The findings suggest that the adoption of such technology can streamline various aspects of business management. As rural tourism in Serbia and border regions continues to evolve, the increased use of ICT, particularly tools like Garson software, can play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable growth. Promoting the awareness and adoption of such technologies in rural areas should be a key priority for stakeholders aiming to modernize the tourism industry.

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