

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM AND THE INFLUENCING FACTORS OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract

Being part of the tourism industries requires substantial knowledge. Therefore, it is important to be aware of all the factors that influence a tourist to purchase a particular tourism product. These complex factors are vital into the final purchase decision of an offer with emotional value for customers. This paper presents the typologies of tourists and tourism, and in relation to these aspects, the different types of segmentation, as well as several motivators and determinants that tourism companies and tourists should acknowledge in order to provide the premises for a win-win situation.

Keywords: *consumer behavior, motivators, market segmentation, determinants, tourists, types of tourism, purchase.*

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1. Introduction

It is crucial for a tourism manager to research and understand the way in which consumers make decisions and the factors that motivate and encourage tourists to make particular purchases. Also, when analyzing a tourist's consumer behavior companies must take into consideration: the needs and habits of the consumers, consumer preferences and requirements, tourism market segmentation, and motivational factors such as cultural, personal, emotional, status, personal development, physical, etc.

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The subject of consumer behavior in the tourism context is the key to the foundation of all marketing activities which are implemented in order to establish, advertise, and sell tourism products. The success of a marketing activity is primarily related to understand consumers' decision making process to buy or use tourism products. Knowing their behavior patterns and the factors that influence their purchase, tourism companies should fully comprehend when they should get involved in the process in order to obtain the results they want. Also, in this way, organizations will be aware of how to influence their customers to buy different products that fulfill their expectations and needs.

2. Typologies of Tourists

It is important to know that tourism has existed for centuries, therefore this industry can be divided into different types of tourism, such as: business tourism, health tourism, religious tourism, educational tourism, social tourism, cultural tourism, visiting friend and relatives, special interest tourism, and hedonistic tourism. All of these types are included in two main categories-domestic and international tourism, with a subdivision together with inbound and outbound tourist issue.

A popular debate regarding tourism is related to the differences between tourist and traveler. A tourist (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1996) is someone who purchases a package from a tour operator, while the traveler is the person who makes his/her own independent arrangements for their personal vacation. However, Sharpley (1994) noted that the word "traveler" is usually applied to someone who is travelling for a long period of time, especially back-packing on a limited budget, and it also involves a spirit of freedom, adventure and individuality. On the contrary, the term "tourist" is usually used in a rather depreciative sense to describe those who are involved in mass produced package tourism.

Smith (1989) distinguished seven types of tourists: explorers are a small group who travel as anthropologists; elite tourists are experienced travelers who like expensive tailor-made tours; off-beat tourists plan to get away from other tourists; unusual tourists make side trips from organized tours to experience local culture; incipient mass tourists travel in destinations where tourism is not yet completely dominant; mass tourists want the same things they are used to at home; charter tourists have a little or no interest in the

destination itself, as long as the trip will provide them with all the accommodation that they required.

3. Market Segmentation in Tourism

Market segmentation is defined as a process of dividing a large homogenous market into groups of people who have similar needs, wants, or demands. The purpose of the segmentation is to provide the basis for creating a marketing mix that will perfectly correspond to the expectations of clients in the targeted segment. This explains the fact that market segmentation is a form of consumer classification used to provide support for the marketing function in a tourism organization.(Dibb,2001)

Segmentation is aimed to serve the need of marketers, as Middleton and Clarke (2001) believe that: ‘Market segmentation and product formulation are mirror images if they are correctly matched’. Certainly, segmentation is designed to improve the work regarding all four Ps of the marketing mix (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place). However, organizations must take into consideration that successful marketing is not all about one method of segmentation alone, it is important to use and combine all five types of segmentation (or six in tourism) in order to accomplish the profit or result that the company is expecting.

In the following sections, different types of market segmentation for tourism are developed. In this context, potential or existing customers can be divided by five main criteria, into groups who have similar characteristics as buyers.

3.1. Geographical Segmentation

Geographical segmentation is based on collecting and analyzing information according to the physical location of the customer (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2003). Also, this type of segmentation divides markets into different geographical areas by region, country, city, population, climate. For example, a tourism company can segment its customers as urban or rural consumers, clients who live north-west countries or more specifically near the mountains, etc. in order to have a specific perspective profile of their target audience.

3.2. Socioeconomic Segmentation

This method inquires to subdivide markets by different socioeconomic variables. For instance, in the UK society is separated into six groups, based on occupation and defined by the letters A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Socioeconomic variables are represented by: income, occupation, education, lifestyle, price sensitivity, and brand preference (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). For example, a tourism company may be interested to examine a target group who only acquires products from a competitor, a tourism product purchased only by customers who have an average income, or a target group who wants to spend a few days away from the urban turbulence.

3.3. Demographic Segmentation

This form of segmentation is based on different characteristics and is really important for tour operators and travel agents to better understand their customers who are planning a trip (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1995), such as:

- Sex – men are known for their passion for sports, while women love to shop;
- Age – tourism companies usually divides the market in three main categories: young teenagers, adults and older generation;
- Religion – expedition or mission market,
- Family status – according to some research, the place in the family cycle of the consumers is decisive for purchasing different products or services, especially in tourism, for example: teenagers will spend their holiday in a place where they could have fun, separately from their parents, enjoying their independence, while a family with small children would want to spend their vacation in a place that provides for their children all the utilities, but also to allows them to relax under a dispensable budget.

3.4. Psychographic Segmentation

This form of segmentation is considered to be a modern technique that already has begun to influence different areas, including clothing, food, perfume, cars, jewelry, drink and tourism (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

This method is based on the idea that factors like attitudes, lifestyles, opinions and personalities of people determine their behavior as consumers. For instance, extrovert people will love the idea to enjoy a hedonistic holiday (sun, sand, sea), while introvert people will love the idea to spend their vacation on an island away from crowded areas, whereas spa holidays target consumers who have predisposition towards a healthy lifestyle and finally tourists who seek a relaxing trip opt for visiting museums and getting to know the culture of the country they visit.

3.5. Behavioristic Segmentation

This technique involves the relationship between the consumers themselves and the product. According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), this method incorporates different variables like: user status (never used, ex-user, first-time user, regular user); readiness stage (unaware, aware and interested, desirous of purchasing, intent on purchasing, planning to purchase immediately); attitude towards product (enthusiastic, indifferent, hostile); benefits sought (status, economy, new experiences, good service, excitement, making friends); loyalty to the product (total, partial, none); purchase occasions (regular purchaser, once-in-a lifetime purchaser).

Even though this types of segmentation are known to be successful in any area, some tourism academics have searched for some techniques relevant only in tourism, Middleton and Clarke (2001) suggested there are six ways of segmenting markets in travel and tourism: purpose of travel; buyer needs, motivations and benefits sought; buyer and user characteristics; demographic, economic and geographic characteristics; psychographic characteristics; price. While four of these are similar to the classic methods, they are however formulated differently and purposely in tourism.

4. Motivators in the Decision Making Process in Tourism

A wide range of variables motivates consumers to buy tourism products and make some particular purchase decisions. Therefore, there are two main categories of motivators (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007): those which motivate a person to take a holiday and those which motivate a person to take a particular trip to a specific destination at a particular time.

The motivators can be divided into (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007): cultural (sightseeing, experience new cultures), physical (relaxation, suntan,

health), emotional (nostalgia, romance, adventure, fantasy), personal (visiting friends and relatives, make new friends, need to satisfy others), personal development (increasing knowledge, learning new skills), status (exclusivity, obtaining a great deal).

When talking about motivators, it is important to take into consideration the fact that every tourist is different and so are the variables that motivate him. The factors which determine an individual tourist's motivations are: their personality (friendly, loner, adventurous, careful, secure, shy); their lifestyle – depends directly to their interests and concerns; their likes and dislikes; their past experiences as tourists and particular type of holiday; their weaknesses or strengths - whether these depends to their health, wealth or the desire to escape from the monotony of their daily working life. Also, these types of motivators could be modified as a response to some changes that appear in consumer's personal life, such as: having a child, getting married, a modification of income, changing expectations or experiences as a tourist, health issues.

When considering a holiday, it is relevant to take into account the big influence the travel companions can have on how a vacation is perceived. For example, a housewife will chose a romantic destination when celebrating her wedding anniversary with her husband, but will chose another destination when planning to leave with her children, case in which the main motivation it will be to make them happy. And when she goes on holiday with her churchgoers, she will pursue a spiritual accomplishment.

4.1. The Connection Between Market Segments and Motivators

Motivators vary not only for each individual, but also between different market segments; for example: some academics seem confident that usually segments are based on demographic criteria. They seem to assume that, according to the demographic segmentation, tourists are divided in three main categories: young people who want to party, have fun, enjoy their independence, relax, dance and make a lots of new friends; parents who are concerned with keeping their children safe and happy, parents who want to escape from time to time from their parental responsibilities; and lastly, elderly people who prefer tranquil and comforting activities.

Another big role in motivating a tourist is represented by cultural segmentation. Some research has been conducted regarding national and

cultural differences in relation to the factors that motivate a tourist to purchase. This could come as a surprise because in the previous years, more and more, tour operators tried to sell their products in other countries. But, there seems to be some similarities between groups of countries in terms of motivation. For instance, people in northern European countries and the northern states of the USA are often motivated by the purpose to get some sun and relax. Nevertheless, in warm countries such as India or Saudi Arabia, the intention is to go on holidays to a colder area, in order to escape from the heat, and to change the climate, once in a while. Moreover, another relative example is the one regarding the spiritual holidays. The aim of these types of trips is to achieve spiritual fulfillment; this kind of trip is generally common among Muslims, rather than Christians. (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2005)

4.2. Timing of Purchase Decisions in Tourism

Motivators can also vary depending on when the decision to buy a holiday is made and which are the sources from which they obtain their information. Regarding the time of the purchase, a last-minute booking may reflect a wish to obtain a discount, the goal to surprise a partner, or could be the response to stress at work. Contrary, a vacation booked many months in advance could be the result of a desire to participate to a famous annual event, visit some relatives or some friends, or just wanting to have everything in order and to control all the details of the trip. (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2005)

In conclusion, the holiday represents a compromise between multiple motivators, so a tourist has two options: to purchase a service that includes partly all the motivators that he wants or to focus on one dominant motivator.

5. Determinants in the Decision Making Process in Tourism

Determinants are divided in two main categories: those variables which determine whether or not someone will be able to go on a holiday and those factors which determine the type of vacation, providing that the first set of determinants allows a holiday to actually take place. Determinants can be subdivided into: those which are personal to the tourist and those which are external to the tourist (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2003).

Personal determinants of tourist behavior are: circumstances: health, disposable income, leisure time, family commitments, work commitments; knowledge of: destinations, the availability of different tourism products, price differences between competitor organizations; attitudes and perceptions: perceptions of destinations and tourism organizations, political views, preferences for particular countries and cultures, their attitudes to standards of behavior as a tourist; experience of: types of holidays, different destinations, taking a trip with particular individuals or groups (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

These determinants will differ among tourists and depending on the time. Different individuals will perceive certain determinants to be more important than others, based on their attitudes, personalities, principles, fears and past experiences. Even for the same person, these determinants will vary, depending on different factors such as family situation, changes in age and experience as a tourist. Plus, these personal determinants could represent a market opportunity for the tourist industry.

Since the collapse of the economy, managers feel the need to work harder and improve their services and products as much as possible. This has been the reason for the increasing of the weekend breaks because it meets the needs of the tourist who searches for a short trip and a break from work. And from an economics standpoint, this has been highly beneficial for destination tourism.

Moreover, external determinants of tourist behavior are represented by: political factors – government legislation and policy, immigration restrictions and visa requirements, civil disorder and terrorism, the nature of the political system, taxation policy, tourist taxes; the media - travel media (promotion through mass-media and guidebooks) and non–travel media (news programs and wildlife programs on television; tourism organization marketing- foreign destinations’ advertising campaigns, tour operator’s brochures, travel agent’s special promotions (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

Tourist behavior is driven by their own personal determinants or external determinants, depending on their personality and lifestyle. People who have interests in outdoors activities and environment and social responsibilities could be more tented to take into consideration external factors when making a decision to buy a travel package, while introverted people may be influenced by a series of internal determinants.

It is important to have in mind that these determinants could be facilitators (an appealing guidebook) or restraints (a limited budget) through tourists who want to transform their motivations and desires into reality.

5.1. The Determinants that Influence Group Travel

Usually, determinants are really complex and vary depending on the type of group that tourists belong to, whether it is a family or a group of friends.

Each individual has his own determinants, but in the case of a group, their determinants may differ depending on the dominant factors. In order to satisfy the demands of a group, it is necessary to satisfy each person from a particular group, which could be quite difficult. The solution of this problem, according to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), is to make a compromise on behalf of each group member.

On the other hand, a strong group can set up a certain imposing determinant, such as fear of flying, on every member of the group. In this situation, even though some members of the group will prefer to travel by airplane, they might have to compromise, and use another means of transportation. In conclusion, the final decision is made by taking into consideration what the majority of the group wants and needs.

6. The Role of Travel Agents in Consumers' Decision Making Process

The tourism has a vital role in fulfilling the determinants of tourist behavior. For example: it creates products in order to correspond the determinants of some tourist behavior, offers all the information that is required by potential tourists, creates promotional offers, provides confidence to the tourists assuring them that the product is the ideal one and meets all the requirements and desires of the tourists, and offers the possibility to tourists to buy different tourism products on credit.

An important part in the tourism industry is played by the travel agent, who is the connection between service producers from this industry and their customers. As Ryan (1997) says: 'The information provided becomes part of the information that determines a holiday-maker's expectations. The travel

agent possesses the means to create the antecedents of success or failure of the holiday’.

Also, a travel agent is a professional who concentrates on making travel arrangements on behalf of other contracting entities. The services of a travel agent can be extremely useful. For instance, travel agents have access to cheap fares, hotel deals, and other travel advantages which consumers cannot get on their own.

A travel agent can work as a freelancer, or as part of a larger travel agency. Some agents can be specialized in some particular fields like business travel, exotic travel, or honeymoon arrangements. Additionally, customers often ask for the opinion of a travel agent in order to see what his recommendations are because his opinion may be valuable for them. Therefore, a travel agent can provide for their tourists a complete package of services that meet their demands or the travel agent can handle only certain details of the trip (the means of transportation, accommodation). A travel agent can also be helpful in the decision making process of a tourist because frequently many tourists make this decision on their own, for some wrong reasons, under the influence of different determinants, which are no longer accurate. Thus, this is where a tourism organization gets involved, more specifically the tourism organization must be aware of the mistakes and outdated determinants of tourist behavior when planning any activity (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

The information provided becomes part of the information that determines a holiday-maker’s expectations. The travel agent possesses the means to create the antecedents of success or failure of the holiday (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007). That is why a travel agent who is unprepared, who doesn’t have all the information or gives some improper advice, could determine a customer to buy or avoid using his services, or to further influence and give negative opinions of his holiday destination to friends, relatives and acquaintances.

7. Conclusions:

As any other complex process, the decision making process in tourism has its weaknesses in explaining this type of consumer-related mechanism, because in order to make an analysis regarding acquisitions in tourism, tourism companies must be aware of all the factors that influence a consumer,

in different periods of time. This is particularly complicated due to the fact that tourists change their requirements often and their needs are unlimited. Therefore, the way tourists choose their holiday should be continuously researched in order to better understand tourist behavior.

Consumer behavior should be studied in terms of its many patterns during the purchase process, because it depends on different factors that can appear during an acquisition (for example: the type of holiday to be taken, their motives and the determinants of that particular purchase, their lifestyle, their social position). Another impediment regarding the tourism products and services is the intangibility of these offers, which often leads to doubts and uncertain decisions during a purchase. This is why individuals may take advice from friends, relatives, travel agents and television which could determine certain underlying problems for companies when they are studying tourist behavior patterns. Withal, the purchase of the holiday is a major event in an individual's life because the trip could represent the escape from the monotony of his life, his work and could become the opportunity to relax, have fun, and enjoy a few days away from home.

Thus, when planning a vacation, a travel agent, has to take into consideration two types of factors, internal and external to the tourist. The internal factors can be divided into: personal motivators, personality, disposable income, health, family commitments, work commitments, past experience, hobbies and interests, existing knowledge of potential holidays, lifestyle, attitudes, opinions and perceptions. The external factors are classified into: availability of suitable products; advice of travel agents; information obtained from destinations; tourism organization and the travel media; word-of-mouth recommendation of friends and family, political restrictions on travel, health problems and vaccination requirements in destinations; special promotions and offers from tourism organizations; the climate/destinations of regions (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

Furthermore, the decision-making process is really complex and depends on several factors and many decisions, which further are influenced directly by motivators, determinants and segmentation criteria. Segmentation divides the population into subgroups who have the same purchase characteristics. It seems that the decision of every individual from the subgroup is driven by a range of influences, that are subdivided into four criteria: demographic (age, sex, religion, family status), geographical (region, countries, population), psychographic (lifestyle, personality), behavioristic

(relationship between the tourist and the product- benefits, advantages that a customer expects to receive from a product).

In conclusion, it is critical for a tourism entrepreneur to be aware of the three main stages in the decision-making process in order to have a profitable business. These levels are: pre-decision stage and decision process, post-purchase evaluation, future decision-making. Thereby, the purchase process is the result of three factors: motivators, acknowledgment, perceptions and determinants (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007). These aspects will be further developed in future studies.

Also, future research should draw attention to the process of making the right decisions in this particular area and to understand how consumers respond to different variables. Mostly, it is important to study tourist behavior in relation to different types of tourism activities (mass tourism, niche tourism, and macro-niche tourism, which is further subdivided into cultural, environment, rural, urban, etc.).

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