

**THE INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION OF A HOTEL CHAIN.  
MULTICULTURALISM AND PERFORMANCE**

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**Abstract**

*The objectives of this research were to determine the culture-based motivations of ACCOR clients, in order to determine and to suggest the best marketing strategy that should be adopted by the group, for each of its brands. The first part outlines basic theories about the international development of the hospitality industry, the influence of the marketing strategies over the development of the hotel and about tourist motivations, while the second part is based on a research upon ACCOR clients' culture-based motivations. The findings will help framing new marketing strategies for ACCOR group for a better adaptation to tourists' cultural demands.*

**Keywords:** *consumer behaviour, tourists' motivations, multiculturalism, strategies, international development*

**JEL classification:** *M31*

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**1. Introduction**

The differences in customer attitudes and behaviour emphasize the importance of the hotel's management, exploring the feature of each customer group, segmenting the clients and releasing new marketing strategies that are appropriate for each segment. On the international level, tourism consumers do not have the same values or the same behaviour. They have very different attitudes. As a result, marketers must take into account such differences and tourism businesses must propose offers and tailored travel programs. Tourism companies that activate in many parts of the world must adapt their products

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and marketing strategies to meet the unique needs of some consumers, present in various markets from certain countries or regions, even if they wish to offer standard offers for economic reasons or to comply with the brand standards. Therefore, which is the best development strategy to be adopted by the tourism company?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. The international development of the touristic activity**

When talking about tourism, we definitely talk about international business. The globalization of the economy, the increased trade and also the proliferation of destinations particularly benefit the tourism sector.

Culture plays a fundamental role in determining an individual's travel needs. This is why marketers are developing touristic offers adapted to these various segments. Even if there are groups of people who share common ground, they do not have the same behaviour or the same attitudes. Therefore, tourism businesses must come up with unique touristic offers, taking into account such differences to meet the unique needs of some consumers from different markets and to meet the needs of consumers in some countries or regions.

The ACCOR Group reported a decline in sales of 3.4% in Europe. Key European markets are France, UK and Germany, while the attendance of the group hotels deteriorated sharply in southern Europe. The turnover of the Group increased by 27.2% in Asia-Pacific and by 13.5% in Latin America. Asia Pacific has concentrated almost half of the openings of ACCOR hotels in 2012. Due to the acquisition of Mirvac Group in Australia and New Zealand in May 2012, Accor increased its hotel portfolio with 48 hotels and its hosting capacity with approximately 6,100 rooms. The number of hotels in Asia Pacific increased by over 16% in 2012, due to the openings of hotels under the Pullman brand and Mei Jue (the Chinese adaptation of the Grand Mercure brand) (Xerfi, 2013).

Internationalisation on the emerging markets is one of the strategic priorities of the ACCOR group:

- Accor opened 121 new stores in Asia-Pacific, Africa, Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean in 2012. Over a quarter of hotels are now within these high-growth markets.

- In the Asia-Pacific region, the group opened hotels usually positioned in the upscale and luxury, thanks to the high influx of business travelers and the rise of a class of new rich.

## **2.2. From global marketing to global-local marketing**

Standardization or global marketing strategy is preferred when the company seeks simplicity and low costs or when talking about the culture-free products, that is to say, products that transcend cultural differences. It is also preferred when the company offers a uniform product that can rely on a consistent global brand image (eg Hilton), or when it is not really possible to change the physical characteristics of the product.

The adapted strategy relies primarily on cultural differences (norms, values, cognitive processes, representations, meanings). Even if we talk about products whose demand is global, the context of the local cultural environment, traditions, expectations and specific obstacles to buying must be taken into consideration.

The global-local marketing focuses primarily on matching offer and its services to the cultural characteristics of the market and its consumers. Actions must be taken to adjust the marketing strategy to specific local markets. This is the glocalisation or globa-glocalisation.

The decisions of adaptation can satisfy the demands of local consumers in order to propose an acceptable offer to increase the commercial viability through long series. According to Charles Croué, adaptations should have very little impact on the cost structure of the production. They give the illusion that the product has been specially developed for the market.

## **2.3. Marketing and culture**

Today's consumer opposes new requirements: respect for culture, comfort and simplicity. Due to the game of international competition, the consumer gives priority to his choice of brands that best fit into his cultural universe. The marketer must constantly be aware of the changing socio-cultural environment, because they need to be integrated into the local marketing policies. Cultural preferences must be integrated into the marketing policies, because the absence of adaptations slows the progression of the commercial product, and therefore the turnover of the company.

The cultural risk is the risk of believing that "what is good for us is good for others," that "what is true at home is true everywhere," that "what

works at home will necessarily work elsewhere." It is therefore necessary that the international company learn to master the cultural differences and to improve its intercultural competence in an international territory. In addition, it must take advantage of the internal cultural diversity and raise a long-term competitive advantage.

According to Metin Kozak, there are 4 categories of touristic motivations: culture, pleasure seeking/fantasy, relaxation, physical:

**Table 1: Tourists' motivations**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Variables</b>
<b>Factor 1: Culture</b>	To increase knowledge of new places
	To visit historical and cultural sites
	To meet local people
<b>Factor 2: Pleasure-seeking/Fantasy</b>	To have fun
	To mix with fellow tourists
	To seek adventure
	To get away from home
<b>Factor 3 : Relaxation</b>	To relax
	To be emotionally and physically refreshed
	To enjoy good weather
	To spend time with people cared deeply about
<b>Factor 4 : Physical</b>	To engage in sports
	To be active
	To get close to nature

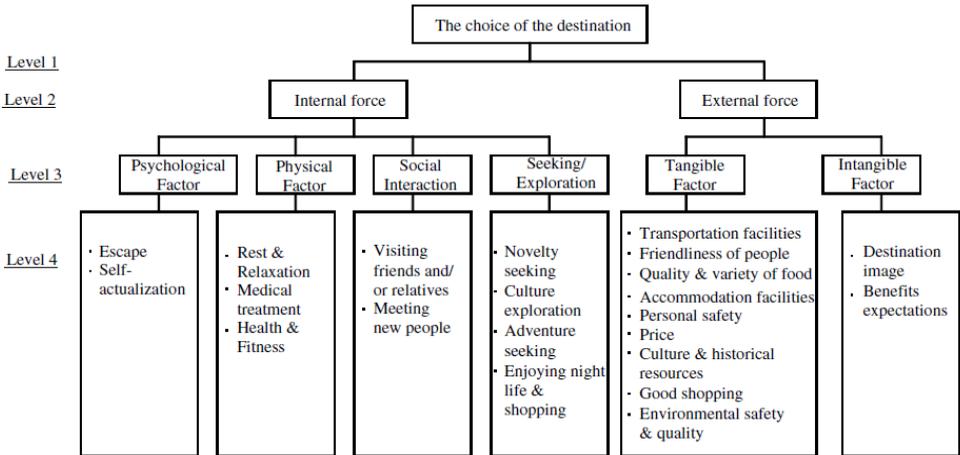
Source: Metin Kozak, *Comparative analysis of tourist motivations by nationality and destinations*, 1999

Identifying the factors that influence people's choice of destination/hotel is essential in developing appropriate marketing strategies. Age, income, gender, personality, education, cost, distance, nationality, risk and motivation, etc. are factors that affect one's choice of destination/hotel. As motivation is a dynamic concept, it can vary from one person to another, from one market segment to another, from one destination to another (Uysal and Hagan, 1993).

One typology for understanding the travel motivation is the "push" and "pull" model developed by Crompton (1979). The push motivations help explain the desire to travel while pull motivations explain the real choice of destination. Crompton has identified seven socio-psychological motivations (push) (escape, self-exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, kinship and

social interaction) and two cultural motivations (pull) the novelty and education. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) summarized internal (push) and external (pull) motivators to travel. Internal motivations include the desire to escape, rest, relaxation, prestige, health and fitness, adventure and social interaction. External motivations were based on the attractiveness of the destination, including tangible resources (beaches, recreational activities and cultural attractions), and travelers' perceptions and expectations (novelty, level of benefits, and image the region). There are still other important factors such as the image of the destination, food, and security. Milman and Pizam (1995) pointed out that the image of the destination is the visual or mental impression of a place that has great public view. Goossens (2000) discussed in depth the role that mental image plays in the content of the pull force. Eating is one of the most enjoyable activities for tourists during their holidays (Ryan, 1997). Quan and Wang (2004) found that food can act as either a primary or secondary motivation and adds value to the image of a destination. Security is a major concern for tourists (Middleton, 1994). The push-pull Crompton model includes four push factors/internal forces (psychological, physical, social interaction, research/survey) and two pull factors/external forces (tangible and intangible).

**Figure 1: The hierarchy of motivations for selecting the destination**



Source: T.-K. Hsu et al, *The preference analysis for tourist choice of destination: A case study of Taiwan, 2008*

### **3. Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to segment Accor clients taking into account their cultural motivations and the cultural differences between them when they decide to stay at an Accor hotel. The specific objectives are:

- 1). To determine the cultural motivations of ACCOR clients (touristic consumer behavior).
- 2). To examine the relationship between tourist motivations and marketing strategies adopted by the hotels.
- 3). To suggest the best international marketing strategy to be adopted by the group, for each of its brands in order to adapt to different cultural expectations of its customers.

### **4. Hypothesis**

The research is based on the following assumption: the French are willing to experience the local culture of the place where they are housed.

### **5. Methodology**

The evaluation procedure of this study consists of several steps, described in the following sections.

The main instrument of this research will be a questionnaire sent to Accor clients to determine their culture-based motivations. The research will turn around the question: when you stay in a hotel from the ACCOR group, you prefer to feel like if you are at home, or you prefer to experience the local culture?

The survey is the way to determine the cultural preferences of French tourists, that is to say, to study the touristic consumer behavior regarding culture and then to suggest the right marketing strategy for the international development of the ACCOR group.

In order to determine the list of travel motivations, a meta-analysis will be required. That is to say, to determine the most used motivations in other studies from this area.

The responses will be coded using a Likert scale, because the motivation is multidimensional and tourists want to have more of an experience when they travel: accommodation, food, communication with local people, visiting natural, cultural or historical sites.

The sample will consist of French people who were housed at least once in a hotel in the Accor Group. There is no particular reason why the

group was chosen, except for the fact that the group is French and we want to determine whether the French tourists want to feel as if they were at home when they travel or if they want to enjoy the local culture.

### **6. The meta-analysis phase**

The primary objective of the meta-analysis was to determine which the most used cultural motivations by researchers are. The list of motivations was generated using the key existing literature: Crompton (1979); Crompton and Lee (1992); Uysal and Juroski (1994); Philip L. Pearce and Uk-Il Lee (2005); Kozak (2002).

The cultural motivations that have been identified are:

**Table 2: The culture-based motivations**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Motivation items</b>
<b>Novelty seeking</b>	Experiencing different lifestyle
	Feel the particular atmosphere of the destination
	Visit places in accordance with my personal interests
<b>Evasion/Relaxation</b>	Escape the daily psychological stress
	Escape the daily routine
	To get away from home
	To be emotionally refreshed
	To be physically refreshed
<b>Auto-development</b>	Learn new things
	Experiencing new cultures
	Meet new people
	Increase knowledge of new places
	Meet local people
	Engage in local events
<b>Relations</b>	Visit the region
	Be with my friends
	Meet people with the same interests
	Spend time with people cared deeply about
	Make new friends

Among the most repeated reasons are increasing knowledge of new places and engaging in different experiences. McIntosh, Goeldner and Richie (1995) suggested that cultural reasons can be identified as the desire to see, to

know more and learn about other cultures, such as people in other places, their lifestyle and their diet.

Moreover, it can be suggested that the research for the cultural experience is one of the key motivators regardless of the habit of traveling and this reason becomes stronger when people accumulate travel experiences. Culture is an integral part of the hospitality and travel industries. It determines what we eat, how we travel, where we travel and where we stay.

### **7. The survey phase**

The selected sample is made of French who were accommodated at least once in a hotel in the Accor Group. There is no particular reason why the sample contains only French, except that the Accor Group is a French group, a fact that makes it attractive to French tourists.

A total of 150 responses were generated ( $n = 150$ ) with the help of an online questionnaire that was distributed for 3 weeks (from 3/26/2014 to 4/13/2014).

### **8. Analysis of motivations**

The responses were coded using a five-point scale ranging from 1= totally disagree to 5=totally agree.

The survey results are in the following table:

**Table 3: The results of a questionnaire**

<b>Motivational factor</b>	<b>Grand mean</b>
Increase knowledge of new places	4,49
Visit historical and cultural sites	4,45
Meet local people	4,40
Eat local food	4,59
Experience new cultures	4,49
Escape the daily routine	4,63
Participate in local events	4,28
Feel as if you were at home	3,05

Source: personal estimates

To better compare the results, the data were aggregated and then analyzed around the grand mean.

The factor with the highest mean is the escape from the daily routine (4.63). 102 people (68%) who were interviewed said that they are quite

consistent with the fact that holiday means to escape from the daily routine. That is to say, the French are trying to get away from the normal life and escape from the daily psychological stress when they go on holiday abroad. Only 5.33% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the issue and 26.67% agreed with that, which explains the strength of the mean.

Another factor with a high mean "Eat local food" which obtained 4.58. That means that 66.67% of respondents said they are quite willing to try local food when they go on holiday abroad. Only 8% had a neutral response and 25.33% said they agree, indicating the very high interest of the French to try the local food in the visited country/region.

The factors "Improve knowledge of new places" and "Experiencing new cultures" both received the same high mean of 4.49, indicating that the French are willing to experiment something new, to discover new cultures and to improve their knowledge of new visited regions.

- When asked if they want to improve their knowledge about new places, 2.67% said they did not agree with that. If we are to look at their other answers, they said they are not willing to visit historical and cultural sites in the area and they are neutral with respect to the meeting with the locals and to the feeling like home, a fact that shows a direct relationship between these four motivational factors (improving their knowledge about new places, visiting historical and cultural sites in the region, meeting with local people and the feeling of being at home when they go on vacation). 8% are neutral and more than a quarter of those surveyed said they agree with the fact to improve their knowledge about new places when they go abroad.

- When asked if they want to experience new cultures, 57.33% said they quite agree and 34.67% said they agree. Only 12 people (8%) were neutral, reflecting the opening of the French on a new cultural environment.

The motivational factor "Visiting historical and cultural sites in the region" has achieved an average of 4.45, with more than half of the respondents who said they are quite willing to explore and discover the visited region and 45.33% said they agree. However, two people said they do not agree at all and two others said they are not willing to explore the area. If we are to look at their other responses, they are neutral with respect to participation in local events or to meet with local people or they are not interested in improving their knowledge about new places.

The majority of responses were positive or very positive with regard to the meeting of the local population. This motivational factor has a mean of 4.40 and almost half of those interviewed (48.00%) responded that they are quite consistent with the fact that holidaying abroad means meeting new and varied people and other 44.00% agree with the same offense. Only 8% were neutral, which shows the interest of French to make new friends from different cultures and learn the cultural differences between nationalities.

When we asked the French if they wish to participate in local events, 41.33% said they are totally agree with it and almost half (46.67%) responded that they agree. That is to say that the French are trying to feel the atmosphere of holiday destination. However, 10.67% were neutral on this question and 2 people said they did not agree. It can be explained by the fact that the French are looking to relax during their vacation and get away from the psychological stress and regular physical.

The last motivational factor, the feeling of being at home received the lowest average of 3.05 which is normal, because more than a quarter of those surveyed (28.00%) responded that they do not agree and 2.67% said they do not agree at all and 41.33% were neutral. However, 28% (17.33% + 10.67%) of those interviewed said they agree or strongly agree with the fact that when they go on vacation and accommodate in a hotel, they prefer to feel like home. We can observe the tendency of French to discover new cultures and learn new things (local food, local people, local customs and traditions, local events, knowledge about new places) when they go on holiday abroad. However, when it comes to feeling the convenience and comfort of home, the opinions are divided. This requires that it (the possibility of discovering a new culture) is explored without cutting the French tourist's habits. The role of the provider is therefore to adapt all or part of the services according to the expectations of every customer and every situation of consumption of tourism products.

▪ **Analysis of the data for each brand**

\* The analysis will be made only for the hotel brands for which more than 10% of respondents were housed at least once: Sofitel (14.67%), Novotel (34.67%), Mercury (33.33%) ibis (60%), ibis Styles (10.67%), ibis Budget (13.33%), hotelF1 (28.00%). For other brands (Pullman, MGallery, Grand Mercure, The Sebel, Suite Novotel, Adagio, Adagio Access and Thalassa Sea & Spa), it was considered that there were not enough answers to validate the research and to draw up a conclusion.

In total, 22 of the respondents were accommodated at least once in a Sofitel hotel, that is to say, 14.67% of the total number of respondents. For almost all motivational factors, Sofitel obtained averages over 4.5. Namely, the French who are housed at least once in a Sofitel hotel prefer to experience the local culture. However, they are not very interested in participating in local events, but this fact can be explained by the very high-quality and diverse services proposed by Sofitel. Therefore, Sofitel must provide services (food, entertainment and discovery) to match with the local culture of the country/region. On average, Sofitel has a rating of 4.30 with respect to the cultural expectations of French tourists.

52 respondents (34.67%) answered that they are hosted at least once in a Novotel hotel. All averages obtained by Novotel show that French who have visited it are very interested in the local culture of the country/region. Thus, Novotel hotels should adopt a localization strategy to offer services related to local culture. The grand mean of motivational expectations obtained by Novotel is 4.34.

In total, 33.33% or 50 of the respondents were accommodated at least once in a Mercure hotel. All motivational factors have achieved high averages, demonstrating the tendency of Mercure clients to experience the local culture. Meanwhile, Mercure obtained a significantly higher mean for the motivational factor related to the sensation of tourists to feel like at home when they go on vacation. This requires that the hotels of the Mercure range should obtain a perfect balance between globalization (not to cut the French of his habits) and localization (to allow the French to explore the new country/region visited). On average, Mercure has an overall evaluation of 4.23 with respect to the cultural expectations of French tourists.

The majority of respondents were ibis clients: 60% of respondents or a total of 90 people. The figures show the tendency of ibis customers to discover new cultures, tasting the local food and meet the locals. However, ibis tourists seek the comfort from home. Thus, the ibis hotels must adapt some of these benefits. On average, ibis has a general assessment of 4.26 with respect to the cultural expectations of French tourists.

Only 16 interviewees were hosted in a hotel ibis Styles (or 10.67%). Figures show this time the interest of French to experience new cultures. At the same time, ibis Styles got the highest average in what concerns the feeling of being at home. Ibis Styles customers rated their motivational expectations with an average of 4.48.

In total, 20 respondents were accommodated in a hotel ibis budget. All averages show that ibis Budget customers are looking to experience something new. Moreover, ibis budget got the lowest average regarding expectations of their customers feel at home. That is to say, ibis budget clients are most interested to get away from everyday life. On average, ibis budget has an overall evaluation of 4.52 with respect to the cultural expectations of French tourists.

The 42 interviewees (28%) who have been hotelF1 customers are ready to discover new cultures and develop their knowledge of the area visited. On average, hotelF1 has a general assessment of 4.17 with respect to the cultural expectations of French tourists.

### **9. Practical implications**

Identifying factors that influence tourists' decisions for a brand or another is essential for the formulation of marketing strategies. Cultural motivations are an important study area for hoteliers, because thanks to that, they have to adopt the marketing strategy that best suits the needs of their clients.

Based on these findings, the recommendation for the ACCOR Group would be to adopt a strategy of glocalization. The results showed that French tourists who were accommodated at least once in a hotel of the ACCOR group, are willing to try something new, discover new cultures, to develop their knowledge of new regions visited and taste local food. Regarding the evaluation of each brand, ibis budget got the highest average which shows the tendency of customers to discover new cultures.

Although actions should be taken to adjust the marketing strategy to specific local markets, adaptations should have only minimal impact on the cost structure of production, in order to be profitable. In addition, the hotels in each brand must meet global standards imposed by ACCOR group.

With more than 150 hotels in Australia and New Zealand, Accor is the first hotel group that offers specific services for Chinese in these two countries. Accor has now more than 50 of its hotels in Australia and New Zealand who have achieved the standards of Chinese Optimum Service to enable them to better respond to the growing market of tourists from China.

Accor is the first hotel group in Australia and New Zealand, which introduced these standards, allowing hotels to better meet the needs of Chinese travelers. The standards include the formation of Accor staff about the differences between cultures, Chinese dishes listed on menus, Chinese newspapers and Chinese TV channels.

Another example that demonstrates the adaptation of the Accor group to its customers is the Hindu festival Diwali New Year or the Festival of Lights. 12 Accor hotels accredited with Optimum Service Standards for Indian visitors have from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of November to meet the expectations of their Indian tourists. Hotel lobbies have dazzled with elegant arrangements of candles and Rangoli patterns, with sweets and traditional breakfasts and special dinners, Indian costumes and entertainment.

## **10. Limitations**

Firstly, the research did not cover all the culture-based motivations of tourists, even though the context seemed to be acceptable. The second limitation relates to the questions asked in the questionnaire: there is no question about the destinations of the Accor hotels. Future research may well focus on destinations because there are tourists who have different motivations depending on the destination.

## **11. Conclusions**

The objective of this research was to identify the culture-based motivations of the French tourists who were accommodated at least once in a hotel of the Accor group in order to suggest the best marketing strategy for international expansion of the group to meet the motivational needs of its customers.

The research has provided results that support its objective. Analysis of the data showed that when French go on vacation, they seek to capture the local culture of the visited country/region. The highest motivational factor is the escape from the daily routine followed by tasting the local food, increase knowledge about new places and experience new cultures. Regarding the evaluation of each brand, only Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, ibis, ibis Styles and

ibis budget and hotelF1 were analyzed. Ibis Budget received the highest average which shows the tendency of customers to discover new cultures.

Therefore, we validated the initial hypothesis that the French seek to appropriate to the local culture when they go on vacation. Thus, the best international marketing strategy to be adopted by the Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, ibis, ibis Styles and ibis budget and hotelF1 is that of glocalization.

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