

CHANGES IN CONSUMER'S BEHAVIOR OF TOURISM PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

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Abstract

The study of consumer's behavior of tourism services has been one of the areas of interest of marketing, in general, and of marketing services, in particular. This interest for the study of consumer behavior derives from the fact that services, and particularly tourism services have experienced a spectacular evolution lately, since the demand for tourism services has radically changed in recent years. Knowing about these changes in the structure of demand are extremely important for both parties involved in the provision of tourism services, as the consumer maximizes their chances of receiving a service that meets their needs which continuously diversifying, while the provider enhances their chances of profit maximization by providing services tailored to consumers' expectations.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the dimensions of the consumer behavior of tourism services, more precisely to highlight some of the directions of development of the tourism services sector in the near future.

Keywords: *consumer behavior, tourism services, the purchase-decision making process*

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1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, marketing specialists define the tourism market through a number of factors, namely: tourism product; firms providing services; tourism consumers; economic and geographical space; the time

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interval covered etc. Consequently, the tourism market is defined as the geographic and economic space where the suppliers of demand and supply of tourism products and the factors that determine their behavior meet and face each other in a given time interval.

Starting from the objectives mainly pursued by the different categories of tourists, we can distinguish: cultural tourism market; historical tourism market; religious tourism market; sports tourism market; scientific tourism market; medical tourism market etc.

Tourism products have dramatically diversified, consumers today being given the choice between a tourism package, which is a combination of tourism products offered by individual sectors, such as accommodation, transport, sightseeing, or may opt for separately purchasing these services, such as a plane ticket or visiting a theme park. (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007)

Given the considerable diversification of supply, consumers are offered a wide open choice. On the other hand, the increase of the purchasing power, while raising the level of education and culture, enables the buyer to satisfy several more sophisticated, higher quality needs, aspects which are mandatory for the offer supplier to take into account in order to meet the consumer's needs. If the producer does not understand these new options of the client, the latter will go to another supplier of services.

2. Characteristics of the purchase decision process of tourism products and services

Basically, one cannot discuss the existence of a standardized model of services consumer behavior, but the existence of general behavioral patterns that are contributing to the explanation of the factors that influence the behavior of the travel services consumer, such as the Anderson model, the Nicosia model or the Howard-Sheth model.

Solomon (2014), Mathieson & Wall (1982), Middleton & Clarke (2001) also offer in their works, very interesting approaches on the phases of the purchase decision process and on the roles played by both the consumer and the marketer.

As outlined above, none of the models mentioned is not able to provide a generally accepted explanation about the service consumer behavior, which, although considered by many experts as a linear model, seems rather a highly complex behavioral pattern, taking into account, on the one hand, the defining characteristics of the services in general, and, on the other hand, the

variety of the factors that influence and customize the consumer behavior, in particular.

Thus, in terms of demand, the complexity of the consumer's behavior of tourism services highlights the following:

- High involvement from the consumer in the purchase decision making process of tourism services, each decision in part highlighting different approaches determined by the characteristics or attributes of the services that were considered in the mental evaluation phase of the alternatives of tourism services;
- An extensive external process for information research, generated mainly by the fact that tourism services meet needs related to relaxation and spending a pleasant leisure time, most often with family, which generates high involvement in the information research process, making the consumer use both personal sources (relatives, friends, etc.) and marketing sources;
- The purchase of tourism services has a high emotional impact on the consumer, since it is not a decision that affects one person, but usually the whole family, therefore the high influence of exogenous factors, particularly in the groups of affiliation;
- High-risk in the purchase decision making process of tourism services, a risk determined by the intangibility of the services. The tourism services consumer cannot "try out" the product before purchasing it, which is why they will appeal to some "tangible representations" (e.g. photos available on the website of the provider unit), that facilitate the perception of the intangible service.

3. Factors that influence consumer's behavior of tourism services

In the specialized literature, there is no universally accepted classification of the factors that influence the consumer behavior, but there is consensus regarding the importance and necessity of studying these factors in their interdependence.

Thus, Philip Kotler (2009) makes an extensive analysis of consumer behavior, grouping the factors that influence consumer behavior into:

- cultural factors - represented by: culture, subculture and social class;
- social factors - which include reference groups, family roles and statuses;
- personal factors - relating to: age and stage in the life cycle, occupation, lifestyle, economic circumstances, personality and self-opinion;
- psychological factors - nominated by: motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes.

In the approach of Swarbroke & Horner (2007) two types of influences are highlighted, namely:

a. External (exogenous) influence factors:

- the availability of tourism products and services suitable to consumer demands;
- the information that the consumer obtained from tour operators, agencies, tourist organizations;
- the recommendations of relatives and friends;
- the political and legislative restrictions related to travel, such as high risk tourism destinations due to civil wars, epidemics, requirements related to vaccination etc;
- the promotional offers received from providers or tour operators;
- the climate of the tourism destination;

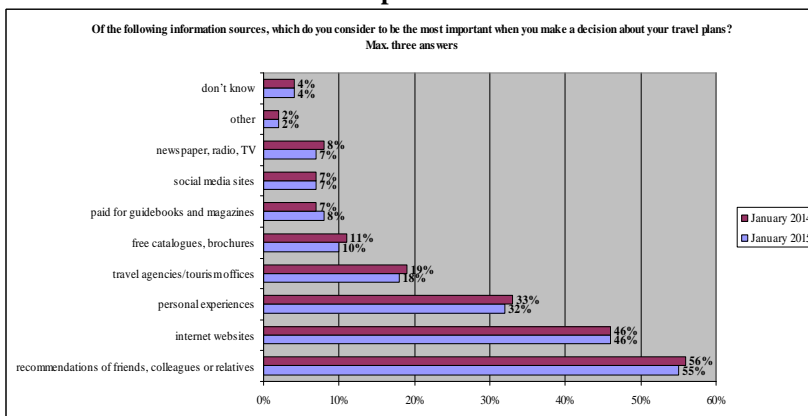
b. Internal (endogenous) influence factors:

- motivation, consumer motives of tourism services;
- consumer personality;
- consumer attitude;
- perception;
- discretionary income (i.e. the amount that a consumer can spend only for himself, in addition to any other expenses outside the household level - Cătoiu & Teodorescu, 2004);
- health;
- commitments to work and family life;
- previous experiences;
- hobbies and activities of interest;
- lifestyle.

4. The analysis of secondary data on the consumer behavior of tourism products and services

In this context, in order to explain some of the determinants of tourism services consumer behavior, the results of a survey appear to be highly relevant. It is about the Flash Eurobarometer 414/2015 conducted by the European Commission in the period January 22-28, 2015, and published in March 2015, aimed at studying the travel preferences of the Europeans. The central objectives of the study included the research of the main reasons (motives) that lead European consumers to choose a particular holiday destination (Figure 1: The main reasons that determined the purchase of a tourism destination in Europe in 2014):

Figure 1: The main reasons that determined the purchase of a tourism destination in Europe in 2014-EU28



Source: European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, p.10

By analyzing the information provided by the above mentioned study, we noted that the main reason that determines the Europeans to choose a holiday destination remains the sun and the sea, the differences being of a maximum 2 percent as compared to 2014. At the national level, the highest percentage of consumers who indicated the sun / sea as the major motive for choosing a holiday was recorded in Slovenia (73%) and Macedonia (70%), opposed by Malta, with only 10% of respondents.

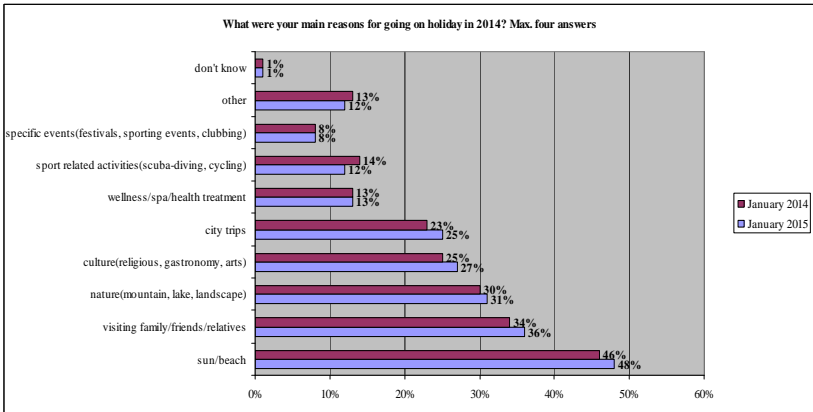
More than a third of the EU28 respondents, that is 36%, indicated that one of the main reasons for choosing a holiday was visiting relatives and friends, while 31% of the respondents indicated that nature was among the most important motives for choosing a holiday in 2014. The analysis of information at the level of the EU member states indicates that Latvia (49%), Montenegro (46%), Turkey (43%), Finland (41%) and Iceland (39%) recorded the highest percentages of respondents who indicated that the major reason was visiting friends and relatives, opposed by Slovenia (10%), while leisure in nature was indicated as main motive in Belgium (55%), Czech Republic (52%), Lithuania (48%) and the Netherlands (43%), the lowest percentage being recorded in Moldova (17%) and Ireland (14%).

In Romania, the information provided at national level have identified the same three reasons, namely the sun / beach (42%), visiting relatives and friends (37%), nature (29%) as being the main motives which lead consumers to choose a certain tourist destination (Figure 2: The main reasons that determined the purchase of a tourist destination in Romania in 2014). However, important differences were recorded for Romania in 2014 (16%) as compared to the EU28 (27%) in terms of culture, as being one of the main motivating factors in the decision process of buying a holiday, the same differences being also valid when choosing tours in cities (25% level-EU28 compared to 17% in Romania).

As mentioned above, making a purchasing decision is greatly based on exogenous influence factors, namely those in the category of consumer information and advice.

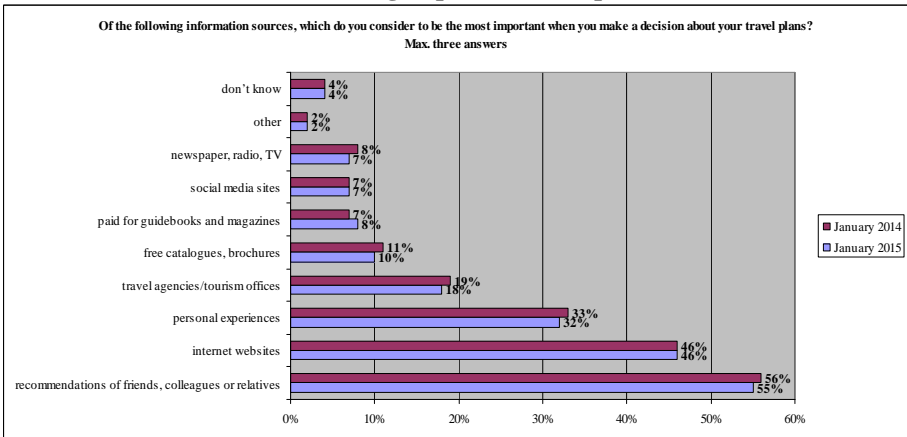
The analysis of data presented in the same European study, Flash Eurobarometer 414, also highlights that the recommendations of the relatives (55%) and of the websites (46%) remain among the most important sources of information when the Europeans plan a trip. (Figure 3: Main sources of information considered by European consumers when deciding to purchase a trip).

Figure 2: The main reasons that determined the purchase of a tourism destination in Romania in 2014



Source: European Commission, Flasheurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, fact sheets

Figure 3: Main sources of information considered by European consumers when deciding to purchase a trip



Source: European Commission, Flasheurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, p.18

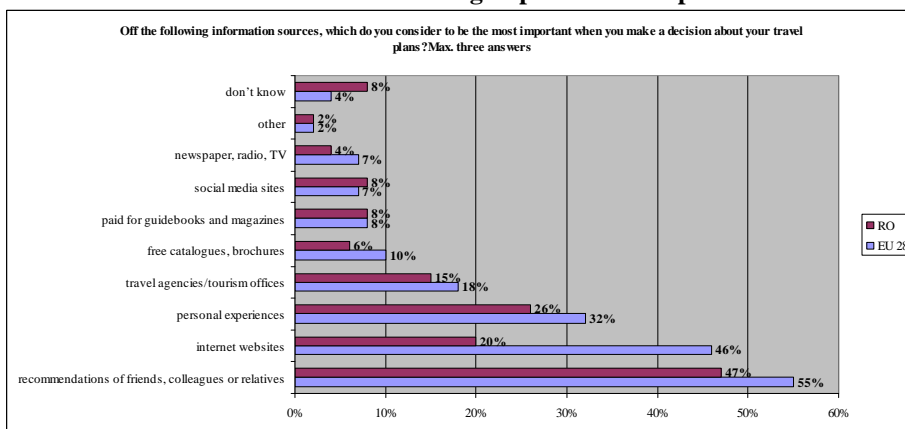
At the level of the EU28 in 2014, respondents from 24 countries declared that the most important source of information when deciding to

purchase a tourism service was the recommendations of relatives and friends, Slovenia recorded the highest percentage of responses, respectively 69%. The internet was declared a major source of information for consumers in Finland (65%), the Netherlands (63%) and Luxembourg (58%), opposed by tourism services consumers in Romania (20%), Moldova (19 %) and Macedonia (18%).

Personal experience, as evidenced in the specialized literature search in an internal source of information was indicated as the main source of information for consumers in Macedonia (52%), Belgium and the Czech Republic by 41%, the fewest reviews being registered in Turkey (18%).

For Romania, the data at national level for 2014, compared to those collected at European level, reveal a broadly similar ranking of the information sources according to the importance given to them by consumers, in the purchase decision making process of tourism service, a significant difference being recorded but in terms of information sought for on websites. In Romania, 20% of the respondents indicated the Internet as the most important source of information, as compared to 46% recorded at European level (Figure 4: The main sources of information taken into account by Romanian consumers in deciding to purchase a trip):

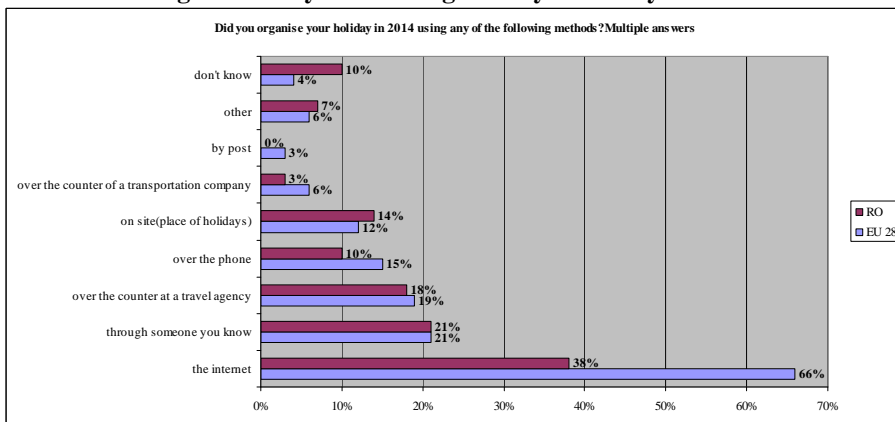
Figure 4: The main sources of information taken into account by Romanian consumers in deciding to purchase a trip



Source: European Commission, Flasheurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, fact sheets

In what regards the method of booking holidays, it can be seen that in 2014, 66% of the European consumers said that the Internet is their preferred way to book tourism products and services, the variations at country level being between 84% in Ireland and 27% in Macedonia (Figure 5: Ways of booking holidays for the year 2014). For Romania, the data show a distribution of responses in favor of the internet (38%) as being the preferred method for booking a holiday:

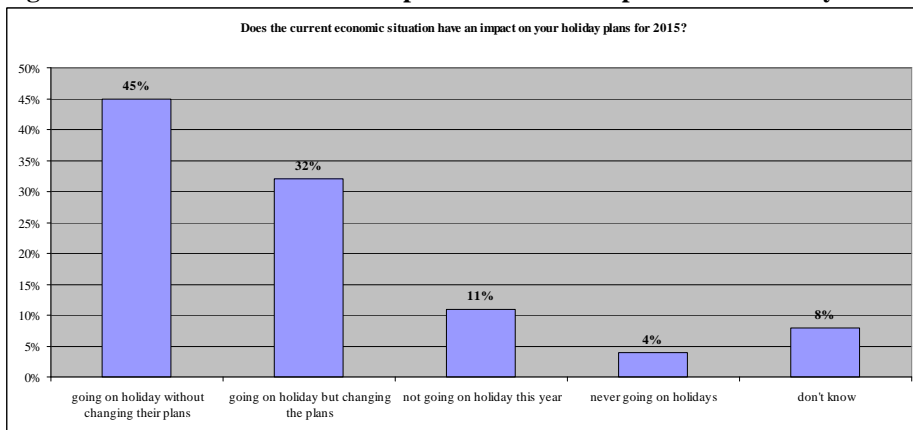
Figure 5: Ways of booking holidays for the year 2014



Source: European Commission, Flasheurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, p. 22

In the same study, the research targeting the intention of buying a holiday in 2015, in the current economic context, highlighted that 45% of the European consumers will follow their vacation plans without changing anything, while 32% of the respondents said they would go on vacation but would reorganize their holidays in terms of expenses, period or destination, while only 11% of Europeans declared that they would not go on holiday this year due to the economic situation. 8% are undecided.

Figure 6: The intention of the European consumers to purchase a holiday in 2015



Source: European Commission, Flasheurobarometer no. 414 –Preferences of Europeans towards tourism, March, 2015, p. 69

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can argue that emerging markets in the tourism sector come to emphasize that the overall market of tourism products and services is going through a period of profound changes, characterized by:

- the widespread introduction of technology as part of the service consumer experience, which resulted in the emergence of new ways of information, purchase and payment of tourism services;
- the use of social media for planning, communication and feedback, thus considering all the stages of the decision making process, including the post-purchase stage of tourism products and services;
- the demand of the consumer is oriented toward new forms of tourism that can provide unique personal experiences (e.g. market tourism services for couples, children-oriented holidays, visiting sites associated with traditions, ecotourism etc.);
- there is a revival of the tourism sector targeted for different consumer segments (e.g. seniors, people with disabilities);
- the increasing demand for tourism services in countries which traditionally generated few tourists (e.g. Asian countries).

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