

Consumption Habits During the Decision Making Process in Tourism

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It is crucial for all organizations that activate in this field to research and understand the way in which consumers make decisions and the factors that motivate and encourage tourists to make different purchases. Also, when analyzing a tourist's consumer behavior, companies must take into consideration: the needs and patterns of the consumers, consumer preferences and requirements, tourism market segmentation, and motivational factors such as cultural, personal, emotional, status, personal development, physical, etc. In this context, this paper aims to examine the responses of 154 tourists in relation to their predisposition to purchase and the patterns that are usually decisive in the decision making process regarding tourism services.

Keywords: consumer behavior, habit of purchase, buyer behavior, trips, customer satisfaction, tourists

JEL Classification: M31, M21

1. Introduction

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 examine and understand consumers' decision making process to buy or use tourism services and products. Knowing their behavior patterns and the factors that influence their purchase, tourism companies could comprehend when they should get involved in the process in order to obtain the results they want to achieve. Also, in this way, organizations will be aware of how to influence their customers to buy different products that fulfill their expectations and needs.

Nevertheless, consumer behavior is a fascinating field, but rather difficult to research especially today in the hyper active and online environment. This statement is more relevant in tourism, where the buying decision has a strong emotional significance (Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007).

The decision making process in tourism is a complex and challenging process that has its deficiencies in explaining this type of consumer-related mechanism, because in order to make an analysis regarding purchasing in tourism, tourism enterprises have to take into consideration all the variables that influence a consumer, in different periods of time. This is very demanding due to the fact that tourists change their requirements frequently and their needs are unlimited. Thus, the way tourists choose their holiday should be continuously researched from many points of view, such as: motivators, factors that influence the decision making process, segmentation of the tourism market, the economic situation from different countries, patterns, habits of consumptions, etc., in order to better comprehend the purchase behavior of tourists. This particular

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Article History:
Received 25 August 2014 | Accepted 10 September 2014 | Available Online 9 October 2014

Cite Reference:
Vinerean, A., 2014. Consumption Habits During the Decision Making Process in Tourism. *Expert Journal of Business and Management*, 2(2), pp. 47-53

research could be difficult and time consuming for all the tourism companies, but in this period of time, where the competition is more and more aggressive, this is the only solution that can guarantee the success that any enterprise is eager to achieve.

2. The Concept and Dimensions of Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior has changed dramatically in the last decade. Currently, consumers can benefit from full custom options, in particularly in tourism services because a consumer can choose his ideal vacation, planned to the last detail, through internet.

The phrase "consumer behavior" is defined by the behavior that consumers display in the research, acquisition, use, evaluation, and disposition of certain products and services from which they expect to fulfill all their expectations and needs. Consumer behavior focuses especially on how individuals take decisions to spend their available resources of time, financial and effort, in order to satisfy all their desires. This includes what and how often they purchase, why they buy and when they buy, how often they use what they buy, how they evaluate after they purchase, and the impact of these evaluations on future purchases (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2009).

Consumer behavior is defined by those actions of individuals involved directly in the production and use of goods and services, including the decision making process that anticipates and determines these acts (Engel and Blackwell, 1986).

During the period of development, the field of consumer behavior has been known as buyer behavior, which reflects with intensity the interaction between consumers and producers at the time of purchase. Many marketers recognize today, the fact that this area is an ongoing process: it does not matter just what happens when the consumer buys a service or product for a sum of money, it also matters what happens before making the decision to purchase and after the acquisition.

Therefore, we must take into consideration different problems from the point of view of consumers, but also the marketers, which occur during the acquisition process, as well as before and after consumption of the product or service. These issues are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Problems that appear during the acquisition process

	From the consumer perspective	From the marketer perspective
Problems that occur before consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the consumer decide if he needs a particular product or service? - What are the best sources of information by which the consumer can procure all alternative data about others consumption alternative? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the consumer's attitude towards the product and / or the modified one? - What are the indices that causes the consumer to presume what products are superior to others?
Problems that occur during the acquisition process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is buying a product stressful or pleasant experience? What does this process say about the consumer? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do factors such as time and retail store influence the buyer's decision to purchase?
Problems that occur after consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the chosen product offer the pleasure and performance predetermined? - How is the product disposed of? And which are the consequences of its removal on the environment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What determines whether a consumer will be satisfied with the product and whether he will purchase it again? - Will the consumer tell others about his experience with that product and influence their purchase decision?

Source: Solomon M., "Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having and Being", 2004, p.112

3. Research Premises

3.1. Research Context

One of the most important contributions of the marketing research is to define the decision problem that requires providing solutions. Thus, the decision problem identified on the conducted research help us to know in detail some habits of consumption and patterns that interfere in the decision making process in tourism, as a result of all the changes which appear in the social and economic environment, at a global level.

Based on the identified decisional problem, the purpose of the research is determined, which allows the solving of the decisional problem.

Thus, the purpose involves determining consumer preferences and their buying intentions regarding tourism services (Carver and Nash, 2009). The next step in the preliminary stage of the marketing research process is setting the objectives. The established objectives are derived from the purpose of the research. They consist in specifying at an operational level all information needed for choosing the optimal decision for each dimension of the investigated problem. Generally, to analyze consumer behavior in tourism I determined the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1:

Usually, tourists who arrange their trips with their family choose as mean of accommodation luxury hotels (4-5 stars) or mid-level hotel (3-4 stars).

Hypothesis 2:

In general, tourists' expectations were completely satisfied when they spend over 2000 euro on their trips.

Hypothesis 3:

Ordinarily, tourists, whose expectations were partially satisfied, spend their holiday in a camping or hostel.

Hypothesis 4:

In most cases, tourists who travel alone, spend on their trips less than 500 euros.

The research instrument for this research implied four questions that are defined conceptually and operationally in Table 2.

Table 2. Conceptual and operational definition of variables used in research

Name of the variable	Conceptual Defining	Operational Defining
Habit of travel	Ways of traveling that have acquired consistency in terms of acquisition of tourism services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trips with family • Trips with friends • Couple trips • Traveling alone
Habit of acquisition	Consumers' consistency regarding the budget allocated to the acquisition of a trip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • < 500 euro • 500-1000 euro • 1500- 2000 euro • >2000 euro
Satisfaction	Consumers' expectations regarding the quality of tourism services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expectations were completely satisfied • The expectations were highly satisfied • The expectations were partially satisfied • The expenses did not meet all the expectations

3.2. Design Phase of the Research

The design phase involves all activities of the researcher to identify the sources of information necessary, the means used in gathering information, systematization of the information, establishment of the budget and time scheduling of the research.

For this research, choosing the right information sources, was based on the identified objectives in the previous phase and are presented in the following table, based on some basic criteria:

Table 3. Typology of information sources used in the research

Criteria	Types of sources	Explications
The origin of the source in relation to the organization requesting the information	External sources	In this research, I will follow all the responses of consumers and final users of tourism products and services offered by different organizations.
The type of information provided by the source	Primary information sources	This type of information source relates to those obtained for the realization of the objectives of the research, and they are obtained from the population. The aim is to seek information from national consumers, namely from Romania.
The identity of the source	Individual	The individual is the basis of the research to obtain data regarding the purchase behavior of some products such as tourism services, but also detecting the dimensions that lead to the decision of acquisition.

In this research, I used dependent variables (information that involves knowing the socio-economic and demographic profile of respondents) and independent variables (e.g., intention to purchase or repurchase, buying habit of holidays, etc.).

The measurement of each variable was realized using a particular scale chosen depending on the nature of the studied (Table 2), and objectives of the research.

For data collection, I used as a method of gathering information, the primary and direct research. In this case the information was collected directly from their carriers using the internet, from January 4 to March 14, 2014.

The research was a selective one and it was conducted on a sample of 154 people. The method of research used was the survey. The survey is defined as a primary data collection method, based on a questionnaire administered to a representative sample of respondents (Cătoi, 2002).

The data collection phase for this research was conducted via the Internet. The questionnaire was created on the website the forms section of GoogleDocs and its associated link was posted repeatedly on networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, where I have targeted groups with tourism as the common interest. In this way, systematic information was obtained, processed and analyzed from 154 respondents, from 4 January to 14 March 2014. Table 4 present the profile of respondents for this research.

Table 4. Respondents' profile

Sex	Age	Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)	
Male	< 20 years	Pupils	2	100.0	100.0	
		Between 20-25 years	Students	10	37.0	37.0
			Employee full-time	11	40.7	77.8
			Employee part-time	1	3.7	81.5
			Free independent	4	14.8	96.3
			Unemployed	1	3.7	100.0
			Total	27	100.0	
	Between 25-30 years	Employee full-time	9	100.0	100.0	
	Between 30-35 years	Employee part-time	4	66.7	66.7	
		Free independent	2	33.3	100.0	
		Total	6	100.0		
	Over 40 years	Employee full-time	1	100.0	100.0	
	Total male respondents			45	29.2	
	Female	< 20 years	Pupils	4	100.0	100.0
			Between 20-25 years	Students	63	69.2
Employee full-time				23	25.3	94.5
Employee part-time				2	2.2	96.7
Free independent				3	3.3	100.0
Total				91	100.0	
Between 25-30 years		Students	1	12.5	12.5	
		Employee full-time	6	75.0	87.5	
		Free independent	1	12.5	100.0	
		Total	8	100.0		
Between 30-35 years		Employee full-time	3	60.0	60.0	
		Free independent	1	20.0	80.0	
		Unemployed	1	20.0	100.0	
		Total	5	100.0		
Over 40 years		Full-time employee	1	100.0	100.0	
Total female respondents			109	70.8		

4. Empirical Analysis and Results

After establishing the premises of the research, we proceeded with data analysis in the form of a descriptive Crosstabs analysis for categorical variables. Table 5 presents the results of the statistical analysis which takes the form of a contingency table for categorical variables, with a summary and interrelations between two variables. In this case, we considered the question that was studying the preference for a particular season and the habit of purchasing a holiday package.

According to the first Crosstabs analysis, based on the question: "Generally, how often do you go on holidays during one month?" and "Usually, I prefer to go on vacations....", *the first category* will contain all the tourists that never go on holidays, although, one respondent mentioned that occasionally, when he has some free time, he chooses short trips. *The next category* will include consumers who go on trips at least once a year, especially during summer (23.4%). *The third classification* recorded an 8.4 percent of tourists who organize their vacations at least two times per year, whenever they have a few days off. *The last category* includes a percentage of 2.6% (respectively 4 tourists) traveling more than 4 times per year, whenever they have some free time or during summer.

Table 5. Distribution of tourists by frequency and choice of period of holiday

			Usually, you prefer to set your holidays:				Total	
			On both seasons	Whenever I have some free time	During winter	During summer		
Generally, how often do you go on holidays during one month?	Never	Frequency	0	1	0	0	1	
		% Of Total	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	
	Once	Frequency	12	11	2	36	61	
		% Of Total	7.8%	7.1%	1.3%	23.4%	39.6%	
	Twice	Frequency	25	7	0	30	62	
		% Of Total	16.2%	4.5%	0.0%	19.5%	40.3%	
	Three times	Frequency	7	13	0	6	26	
		% Of Total	4.5%	8.4%	0.0%	3.9%	16.9%	
	Four times or more	Frequency	0	1	0	3	4	
		% Of Total	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	1.9%	2.6%	
	Total		Frequency	44	33	2	75	154
			% Of Total	28.6%	21.4%	1.3%	48.7%	100.0%

The second descriptive analysis (crosstabs), applied to categorical variables, aimed at achieving a distribution of responses of tourists to observe the consumer satisfaction regarding the trips they arranged so far compared to the amount of money they are willing to spend on a holiday. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 6.

The first category of responses includes all the tourists who spend on vacations sums of under 500 euros, and overall have had experiences that have risen to their expectations (43.1%).

The second category of responses contains a percentage of 23.5% (Table 3) or 36 tourists who spend between 500-1000 euros per trip, and they are generally satisfied with the tourism services acquired so far, given their disposable income.

The third category includes nine tourists who were willing to pay from 1500 to 2000 euros on different tourism services, being mostly satisfied by these acquisitions.

The last category of tourists is composed of two categories of tourists: people who consider the quality of the trips they had so far in accordance with their expectations, and the other category includes those people whose trips have mostly satisfied their expectations; both divisions were reaching a point of 2000 euro for a specific holiday.

Table 6. Distribution of tourists based on the expenses made on the organized holidays and satisfying their expectations

			What was, in general, the quality of the trips that we have taken so far, according to your expectations?				Total
			The expectations were completely satisfied	The expectations were highly satisfied	The expectations were partially satisfied	The expenses did not meet all the expectations	
How much do you usually spend on a holiday?	< 500 euro	Frequency	6	66	18	0	90
		% Of Total	3.9%	43.1%	11.8%	0.0%	58.8%
	500-1000 euro	Frequency	7	36	1	0	44
		% Of Total	4.6%	23.5%	.7%	0.0%	28.8%
	1500-2000 euro	Frequency	4	9	1	1	15
		% Of Total	2.6%	5.9%	.7%	.7%	9.8%
> 2000 euro	Frequency	2	2	0	0	4	
	% din Total	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	
Total		Count	19	113	20	1	153
		% din Total	12.4%	73.9%	13.1%	.7%	100.0%

5. Conclusions

Like any other complex process, the process of acquisition in tourism has its weaknesses in explaining this type of mechanism linked to the consumer, because, in order to make an analysis based on tourism purchases, the companies which work in this field should be aware of all factors that influence the consumer at different periods of time and different stages of the buying funnel. This is particularly complicated because tourists often change their requirements and their needs very often and their prospect offerings seem to be endless in today's business environment.

Therefore, the way how tourists choose their types of holidays should be investigated continuously in order to better understand the behavior of tourists and offer them those products and services that reflect their needs, desires and predispositions. 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 advices from friends, relatives, travel agents and television which could determine certain underlying problems for companies when they are studying tourist behavior patterns. Withal, the acquisition of the holiday is an important event in a person's life because the trip could represent the escape from the monotony of his life, his work and could become the chance to relax, have fun, and enjoy a few days away from home.

Peter Drucker said that "the main purpose of a business is to create customers." And to create customers, should be considered the idea that consumers base their purchasing decisions on the perceived value of product performance overall to meet their needs and necessities, and the marketing process is based on the exchange that takes place between the organization and consumer. For that transaction to take place, both sides must reach an agreement on the exchange, which will take the form of the marketing offer transaction marketing proposed by the organization.

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. Moreover, it is important to research all the factors that influence a tourist to return to the same tourism destinations, the season preferred to arrange vacations, the principal motives for travel or the most significant sources of information used while arranging trips.

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