CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE DIFFERENT SECTORS OF TOURISM

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Abstract:
Consumer behavior is a fascinating but difficult subject to research. This statement is particularly relevant in the tourism field, where the decision to purchase by a consumer is of emotional significance. The consumption of tourism products is dependent on discretionary time and income. Thus, much attention has been devoted to determining motives for travel behavior, both in terms of choosing one tourism product over another and regarding the decision to commit time and money to tourism, as opposed to alternative uses of those same resources (Todd, 2001).

The holiday that the consumer buys will probably provide the consumer with the major highlight of the year - a chance to escape from work. Consumers are influenced in their decision making processes by many internal and external motivators and determinants when they choose products. It is very difficult to research how these many motivators and determinants affect the consumer when they are making their choices. They may be affected in different ways, according to the type of product or service that they are purchasing (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

Keywords*: consumer behavior, purchase decision, motivators, tourism*

According to Williams (2006), tourism and hospitality have become key global economic activities as expectations with regard to our use of leisure time have evolved, attributing greater meaning to our free time. This results in marketing having potentially greater importance in tourism than in other industries but sadly potential that is not always fulfilled (Morgan and Pritchard, 2002). Williams (2006) believes that a major reason for such unfulfilled potential lies in most tourism marketing focusing on the destination or outlet (in other words the products being offered) and lacking focus on the consumer.

Motivation refers to the processes that lead people to behave as they do. It occurs when a need is aroused that the consumer wishes to satisfy. Once a need has been activated, a state of tension exists that drives the consumer to attempt to reduce or eliminate the need. Marketers try to create products and services that will provide the desired benefits and permit the consumer to reduce this tension (Solomon, 2004)

A wide range of factors motivate consumers to buy tourism products. Motivated factors in tourism can be split into two groups:

- those which motivate a person to take a holiday (primary demand)
- those which motivate a person to take a particular holiday to a specific destination at a particular time(selective demand).

There are many potential motivators that could relate to either or both of these factors. No widely recognized way exists of categorizing the main motivating factors in tourism. However, some of the major ones are:

- physical: relaxation, exercise and health;
- emotional: nostalgia, adventure, fantasy, romance;
- personal: visiting friends and relatives, need to satisfy others, search for economy;
- personal development: increasing knowledge, learning a new skill;
- status: exclusivity, fashionability, obtaining a good deal;
- cultural: experiencing new cultures (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

Every tourist is different and so are the factors which motivate them. The main factors which determine individual tourists' motivations are probably:

- their personality (are they adventurous or cautious? confident or timid?); Adventure travel represents an interesting form of consumer behavior that has see tremendous growth as a segment of the tourism industry. Adventure travel includes such high-risk activities as mountain climbing, backpacking, horseback excursions, hiking, river-rafting, canoeing, and kayaking (Scott and Mowen, 2007); A study by Alvarez and Asugman (2006) provides an example of research into the characteristics of the individual traveller, in this case the personality trait of novelty seeking. In this study, the results indicated that those travelers who scored highly on novelty seeking actively sought risk and adventure in their travel experiences and were less likely to use any information sources at all (Alvarez and Asugman, 2006).

  Those travelers who were risk averse in their personality were likely not only to use a wider range of information sources, but also to choose certain types of holiday and accommodation choices (Alvarez and Asugman, 2006). Thus, the personality trait was linked to both type of travel and information source usage.
- their lifestyle which provides the context for their purchase decision. The motivations are likely to be different for people who are very concerned with being fashionable, or are preoccupied with their health, or live alone and want to make new friends, or enjoy partying;
- their past experience as a tourist and particular types of holiday;
- their perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses;
- how they wish to be viewed by other people.

That motivators change over the time for each individual in response to changes in their personal circumstances. These circumstances might include: having a child or meeting a new partner, an increase or reduction in income, worsening health, changing expectations or experiences as a tourist (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

No tourist is likely to be influenced by just one motivator. They are more likely to be affected by a number of motivators at any one time. Most people's holidays represent a compromise between their multiple motivators. Either one motivation becomes dominant or a holiday is purchased which ensures all of the motivators can be at least partly satisfied.

Not only are motivators different for each individual tourist but they also vary between different market segments. For example, the tourism industry seems convinced that segments are based on demographic criteria. They seem to assume that:

- young people want to party, relax, have dance and make lots of new friends
- elderly people have a preference for sedate activities like bowls and to be almost obsessed by nostalgia
- parents are preoccupied with the need to keep their children happy (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

Another aspect of demographics which the tourism industry seems to believe determines personal motivators, is gender. Different products such as golf trips or shopping trips seem to be based solely on a desire to match the perceived motivators of men and women respectively. However, when one looks at a range of personal motivators, there is some evidence to suggest that there is, in fact, relatively little difference between the sexes.

It is also very important to understand the influence of factors taken into account when making a purchase decision.

Price, in almost all cases, seems to be a constant factor regardless of which sector of tourism we consider. Location is another standard factor, whether we are talking about the area of a city in which a hotel is located, the departure airport offered by tour operator or how far an attraction is from the visitor's home. We can also assume that the tourist's previous experience of an organization's services and the reputation of the organization will also be relevant to purchase decisions in all sectors of tourism. By contrast, there are also some differences, for example:

- safety is a major issue for choosing airlines in some parts of the world, or selecting a holiday destination, but would rarely be an explicit factor taken into account when choosing a hotel
- fashionability can be a major consideration when choosing a holiday destination, but is rarely relevant when choosing airlines or accommodation units (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

Most sectors have peak and off peak seasons, although these differ from one country to another. Often peak seasons will be the same for different sectors in any particular country. School holidays will usually be the peak time of demand for tour operators, charter airlines and visitor attractions. However, for city-centre hotels and scheduled airlines school holidays are their off peak season, because that is when business people usually take their holidays with their families.

Travel research consistently shows the importance of word-of-mouth (WOM) information sources in the travel decision-making process. Friends and relatives have been identified as organic image-formation agents, and it has been emphasized that this WOM information is one of the most relied-upon sources of information for destination selection. Consumers who used friends and relatives as WOM information sources generally appeared to represent travelers visiting friends and relatives, as indicated by their accommodation, transport and activities profile. This group seemed to contain many consumers travelling as part of a family group. The average income was higher than that of other groups, and they exhibited a high rate of repeat visitation. Given this profile, they were less likely to come into contact with other travelers and, therefore, did not identify this as an information source.

Consumers who received their WOM information from other travelers only showed a number of similarities to backpackers (or independent youth budget travelers), although it is acknowledged that they are not all backpacker travelers. This segment was younger, had a lower average income, and showed a preference for campervan or backpacker accommodation (Murphy et.al, 2007).

In most sections of tourism there are some common methods of segmenting the market which appear to work well. These include:

- geographical
- demographic
- business versus leisure travelers
- frequent travelers versus infrequent travelers
- independent tourists versus organized groups.

Alternatively, there seem to be a few approaches to segmentation which appear largely to be applicable to one sector only. Foe example, in the visitor attraction sector, the tourists' personality can be an important way of segmenting the market. Introvert, studious people may prefer to visit museums while extrovert adventurous risk takers may form the core of the market for theme parks where white knuckle rides are the main attraction (Swarbrooke&Horner, 2007).

In recognition of the need to obtain more psychographic information, lifestyle segmentation is increasingly being used in an effort to better understand tourists' consumption behaviour (Swarbrooke and Horner,1999). Related studies in the area of tourism motivation and benefit segmentation assume that everyone wants to be on holiday, although the type of holiday they want differs. The use of selfconcept specifically helps in an understanding of how people actually feel, not just what they do while on holiday, or what they want from their tourism experience (Todd, 2001).

Benefit segmentation also allows the marketing manager to identify very well defined groups of people and target them with well designed products and services.

The global economic recession aggravated by the uncertainty around the A(H1N1) influenza pandemic turned 2009 into one of the toughest years for the tourism sector. International tourist arrivals for business, leisure and other purposes totalled 880 million in 2009, corresponding to a worldwide decline of 4.2%. Growth returned in the last quarter of 2009, after 14 months of negative results. The 2% upswing registered in the last quarter of 2009 contrasts with the declines of 10%, 7% and 2% felt in the first three quarters respectively.Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East led the recovery with growth already turning positive in both regions in the second half of 2009.

Except for Africa, which bucked the global trend with a 3% growth, all world regions were negative in 2009. Europe (-6%), the Middle East (-5%) and the Americas(-5%) were the hardest hit regions. Asia and the Pacific achieved the most impressive upturn, from a 7% decline between January and June to a 4% growth in the second half of the year, closing the year at -2%.

In 2009, travel for leisure, recreation and holidays accounted for just over half of all international tourist arrivals (51% or 446 million arrivals). Some 15% of international tourists reported travelling for business and professional purposes and another 27% travelled for specific purposes, such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious reasons and pilgrimages, health treatment, etc. The purpose of visit for the remaining 7% of arrivals was not specified (UNWTO 2010).

The largest proportion of holidaymakers across the EU (37%) said that the major motivation for their main holiday in 2009 had been "rest and recreation". About a fifth (19%) had wanted a sun/beach holiday and 17% said the main objective had been to visit friends or relatives. "City trips", "nature" and "culture and religion" were each selected by less than a tenth of holidaymakers (6%-7%). Less than 1 in 20 EU citizens who took a holiday mentioned sports- or health-related factors as the major motivation for their main holiday in 2009 (both 3%-4%).

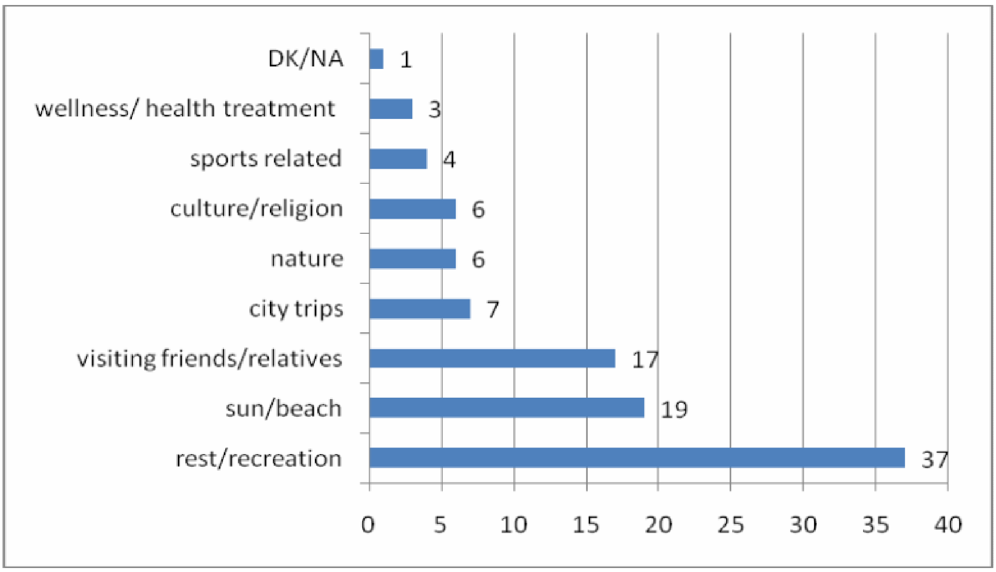

Figure 1. The major motivation for EU citizens' main holiday trip in 2009 Flash Eurobarometer "*Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*" (No 291)

In almost all countries included in the Flash Eurobarometer "*Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*" (No 291), the largest proportion of holidaymakers said they were looking in the first place for "rest and recreation" when they went on their main holiday in 2009. The proportions selecting "rest and recreation" were the highest in Cyprus (65%) and Malta (62%).

In Austria, Norway and Sweden, on the other hand, just 22% of interviewees said this had been their motivation and a similar, or even higher, proportion said they had wanted a sun/beach holiday (22%, 25% and 26%, respectively). "Sun/beach" was also among the three most mentioned factors that had motivated respondents (in second/third position) in almost all other countries. Respondents in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (31%), Slovenia and the UK (both 27%) were the most likely to answer that they had wanted a sun/beach holiday.

In Latvia, on the other hand, almost equal proportions of respondents said that they had been motivated to find "rest and recreation" (37%) or to visit friends or relatives (38%). The proportion mentioning such social reasons for their main holiday trip in 2009 was also high in Estonia and Turkey where 24%-25% of respondents had visited friends or relatives.

Younger EU citizens were more attracted by sun and beach (24% of 15-24 year-olds vs. 13% of the over 54 year-olds), while older respondents more frequently selected "wellness/health treatment", "nature" and "culture and religion" (for example, 9% of the over 54s selected "nature" compared to 3% of 15-24 year-olds). The 25-54 year-olds, on the other hand, were more likely to say said that the major motivation for their main holiday had been "rest and recreation" (40%-42% vs. 33%-34% of younger and older respondents).

Finally, non-working respondents were less likely to have been motivated by "rest and recreation" when they went on their main holiday in 2009 (31% vs. 41%-44% across other occupational categories), but they were more likely to say that they had been motivated to visit friends or relatives (20% vs. 13%-17%).

When deciding on a holiday destination, the largest proportions (32%) of EU citizens named the location's environment (e.g. its overall attractiveness) as the key consideration. Cultural heritage (25%) and the options for entertainment (16%) were the second and third most widespread responses in regard to factors that influenced a choice of destination.

Gastronomy, arts and festivals (or other events) were each considered as having a major influence on holiday decisions by roughly 1 in 20 (5%-6%) EU citizens. Eight percent cited other attractions than the ones listed in the survey as key considerations when choosing a holiday destination and 3% had nothing to say (i.e. they gave a "don't know" response).

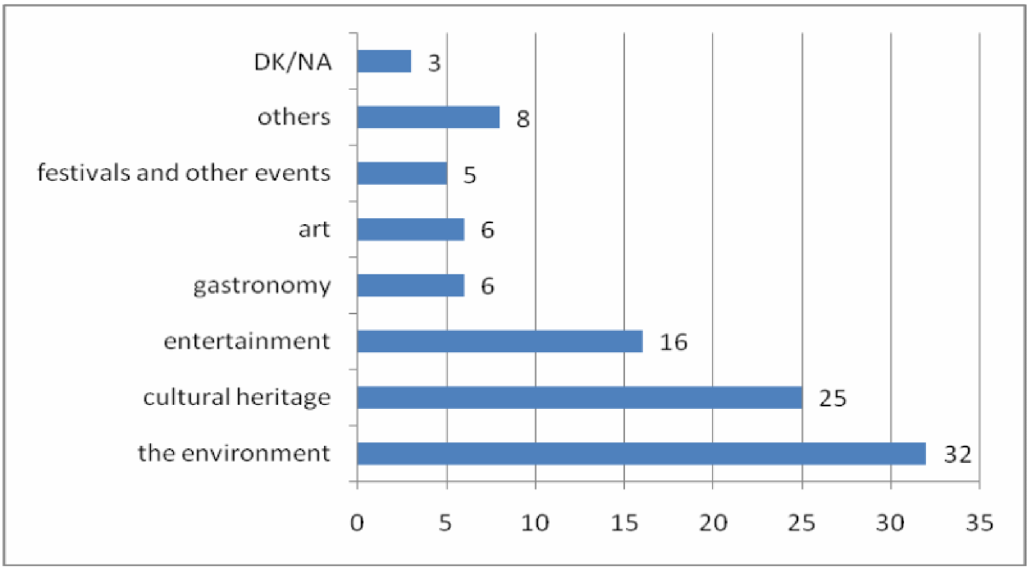

Figure 2. Attractions influencing the choice of destination 02/2010
Flash Eurobarometer "*Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*" (No 291)

The proportion of respondents who named the location's environment (e.g. its overall attractiveness) as the key consideration when choosing a holiday destination ranged from less than a fifth in the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK and Norway (between 13% and 16%) to a slim majority in Germany (53%). In Finland, Austria, Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary and Iceland, between 40% and 44% of respondents named the location's overall attractiveness.

Although Dutch and Norwegian respondents were among the last likely to consider the location's environment as an important factor when choosing a holiday destination, they were among the most likely to name cultural heritage in this context (35% and 37%, respectively). Respondents in Denmark (40%), Turkey (39%) and Cyprus (35%) were as likely, or even more likely, to list cultural heritage. In sharp contrast, only 11% of Romanians named this as an important factor.

The proportion of interviewees who answered that the options for entertainment influenced their choice of destination remained below 30% across all countries surveyed; ranging from 7% in Norway to 29% in Ireland.

Respondents in almost all countries most frequently selected the same two attractions, i.e. the location's environment and cultural heritage; Bulgaria, Romania, the UK and Ireland were the most notable exceptions. In Bulgaria and Romania, respondents were more likely to list options for entertainment than they were to mention cultural heritage as key factors in their decision to choose a holiday destination (Bulgaria: 26% Romania: 20%). In the UK and Ireland, on the other hand, "options for entertainment" ranked higher than "the location's environment" (the UK: 24%;Ireland: 29%).

Regarding holiday destination, Most EU citizens (57%) preferred to spend their holidays in conventional tourist destinations (or at least what they consider as “traditional” or “well-known” destinations). About half as many (28%) would rather go “off the beaten track” and explore less obvious tourist targets (these will be referred to as “emerging” destinations). Thirteen percent of respondents had no preference about the type of destination, and 2% could not – or did not want to – specify a preference.

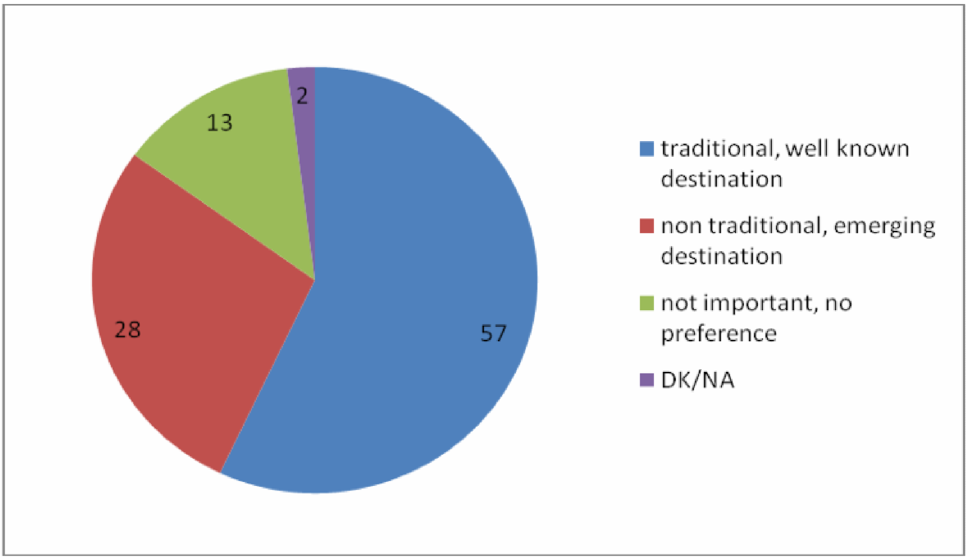

Figure 3. Preferred holiday destinations 02/2010
Flash Eurobarometer “*Survey on the attitudes of Europeans towards tourism*” (No 291)

Conclusions

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Many new destinations have emerged alongside the traditional ones of Europe and North America.

The structure of societies is continuously changing: The world population is forecast to grow to 8.3 billion in 2030, life expectancy is projected to increase in most of the world, households and families are becoming more diverse, and migration is changing the face of societies (UNWTO, 2010). All these changes will impact upon the types of tourists, where they originate from, where they travel to, the types of accommodation they require and the activities they engage in while travelling.

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