

FACTORS OF INFLUENCE AND CHANGES IN THE TOURISM CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract: *Consumer behaviour is a very important aspect to be studied in every marketing activity, therefore in tourism marketing as well. Defining and identifying the factors that influence consumers help in understanding individual needs and buying processes in their whole complexity. Consumers have changed their behaviour over the last two years due to the instability of the economic environment. The author describes in this article the factors which influence consumer behaviour and also presents how it has changed over the past two years.*

Key words: *tourism services, tourism products, factors of influence, consumer behaviour.*

1. Introduction

Consumer behaviour is a highly important issue for all marketing activities which have the purpose to promote and sell tourism products.

The tourism consumer behaviour can be defined as the ensemble of its acts, attitudes and decisions regarding choosing, buying and consuming tourism products and services, and also its post-consuming reactions.

The discovery of the consumer's needs and decision processes is very important for the marketing activity because it allows the marketing manager to improve his own decision-making process, to forecast future behaviour and to have a real and objective image of the consumer demand.

Understanding consumer behaviour is important for developing new tourism products and services because it offers a clearer view of what consumers are

looking for and the manager can reflect them in the development process.

In order to develop effective and efficient advertising campaigns, it is required to comprehend consumer behaviour. Segmentation is used to design advertising campaigns based on the market segment's particular demands.

An understanding of customers' demands can be achieved by answering the following questions:

- Who is important in the buying decision?
- How do consumers buy?
- What are the criteria their choice is based on?
- Where do they buy?
- When do they buy?

These questions define the five key dimensions of buyer behaviour.

Answers to these questions can be provided by personal contact with customers or by the use of marketing

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research. Also, an important source of consumer information is the internet. Using search engines like Google can provide links to web pages which offer consumer statistics.

Buying processes are complex, sometimes involving many variables. Making false assumptions about these processes can result in an otherwise good product or service not being bought.

2. Factors that Influence Consumer Behaviour

The consumer behaviour is influenced by many factors: psychological factors, social factors, cultural factors and even natural factors. These factors can be grouped in three main categories as follows:

1. The first category consisting of personal factors such as tourists' personality, self image, attitudes, motivations, perceptions, life style, age, family life style, profession;
2. The second category consisting of social factors such as culture, family, social class, reference groups;
3. The third category consisting of situational factors such as time, physical ambiance, social ambiance, state of mind.

By understanding these factors one can identify an individual's needs.

2.1. Personal Factors

Personal factors are known also as psychological factors or individual explicative variables and regard directly the tourism consumer.

The tourist's personality is formed by all the characteristics, beliefs, convictions, habits which represent a coherent and stable response of the person at the stimulus from the external environment and which distinguish him from other individuals. The promotional materials of a firm will be edited according to the personality of the clients to which they

address, with a view to finding themselves in those materials.

Self image represents the image that a person has of himself and it has a very big influence on his behaviour.

Attitude is a person's predisposition to answer in a favourable or unfavourable manner at the offer of a tourism product or service. It has a lot of influence over the market position of tourism products.

Motivations can be grouped in four categories: physical motivations - as the desire to practice a sport; cultural motivations - as the desire to visit a church or a museum; interpersonal motivations - as the desire to socialize, to meet new people; prestige motivations - as the desire of being appreciated.

There are two more types of motivations: conscious motivations, which relate to the individual's previous experience, and unconscious motivations which can be identified by indirect psychological investigation techniques.

Perception is a complex process through which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful picture of the world. The perception of a tourism destination results from the interaction of the stimulus specific to it - shape, colour, sound - and the factors that regard the tourist's personality. Therefore, the same tourism destination will be perceived differently by different tourists.

Almost never will an individual perceive reality completely and impartially. Perception improves depending on how many stimuli a person perceives and on the capacity of keeping them in mind. According to its perceptions and some well defined criteria, the tourist can rank the tourism destinations and choose the one that he considers optimal.

Life style is an individual's system regarding his/ her interests, ideas, opinions, actions, consuming habits.

Age is an effective discriminator of consumer behaviour. For example, young people have very different tastes as regards products or services, as compared to old people. Also young people tend to spend more than old people. The age segments which rise interest in tourism marketing from the behaviour point of view are: childhood, teenage, first youth, second youth and old age.

Profession also has a great impact on consumer behaviour. Profession is related to the education level and its impact over an individual is obvious.

2.2. Social Factors

Social factors, such as culture, family or social level have a great influence on behaviour because they define the individual.

Culture refers to traditions, taboos, values and basic attitudes of the whole society within which an individual lives. It is a framework in which individuals and their life-styles develop. Cultural norms can be defined as rules of behaviour.

Family, with its moral, religious, political norms, is the social factor with the highest impact on an individual. The preferences, for example for sport or culture, for resting or movement, for risk or safety, all develop in the family. It influences a child's perception of the world, and this influence lasts to adulthood.

In a family, attitudes and opinions regarding different forms of tourism, destinations, tourism agencies etc. are very easily transmitted.

An individual's needs are likely to change as he or she goes through life. For example, an individual moving from a bachelor stage to one with small children makes the individual to reconsider its priorities, reflecting a different set of needs.

An individual's behaviour is influenced by the phases of the family life cycle.

Table 1 presents how the family life cycle is reflected in consumer behaviour.

The influence of life cycle on tourism consumption [1]

Table 1

Family life cycle phase	Income	Inclination towards tourism
1. Single	Modest	Strong
2. Young couple without children	Rising	Medium
3. Young couple with children under six years	Decreasing	Very weak
4. Young couple with children at school	Rising	Weak
5. Mature couple with children to support	Stable	Medium
6. Mature couple without children to support	Maximum	Very strong
7. Old couple in activity	Stable	Strong
8. Retired old couple	Modest	Very strong
9. Retired single	Modest	Weak

Recent opinions regarding family life-cycles take into account their increasing complexity, brought about by the breakdown of the traditional family into single-parents families, extended cohabitation before marriage or groups of

young people sharing the same house before affording one of their own.

Individuals can identify themselves with a social class, and the values of this class can influence behaviour. Tourists who belong to a superior social layer dedicate a

big part of their time to travelling and tourism. Their reason for travelling is most often leisure or business and they generally travel alone or with their family. Their means of transport are exclusively luxurious vehicles such as car, yacht or plane. He owns vacation houses or stays in luxurious hotels and demands a big variety of auxiliary services during this journey.

Tourists who belong to a medium or inferior social layer dedicate only a small part of their time to travel. They usually travel forced by family or medical problems and often travel in a group to benefit from price discounts. They usually use public transport such as bus or train and demands accommodation and meal at quite low rates. They rarely demand auxiliary services during the journey.

Reference groups can be defined as groups of people that influence an individual's attitude or behaviour. These groups may consist of family members, friends or colleagues. Reference groups influence their members by the roles and norms expected from them and they may be seen as an important determinant of behaviour.

An opinion leader is someone in the reference group from whom other members seek guidance; therefore such persons can have great influence on purchase decisions.

They influence the reference groups as a consequence of:

- their capacities of personifying the group
- their rich experience and knowledge
- their privileged position in the communicational system.

Tourism firms are interested in attracting opinion leaders because of their abilities to influence groups and try to convince them regarding the quality of their services.

2.3. Situational Factors

In addition to an individual's personal and social necessities, his needs are also

influenced by the situation in which he currently finds himself.

The time a tourist disposes to decide the purchase during the journey, and also the time gap between the moment of purchase and the moment of payment, influences the purchasing behaviour. For example, the tourist does not pay as much attention to details when the time to decide the purchase is short. Generally speaking, the purchase decision is adopted more easily when the time gap between the purchase and the payment is larger.

Physical environment refers to the place from where the client buys the product, such as light, temperature, sound, and also what defines the tourism product, such as weather, climate, access, the beauty of the scenery. The journey environment influences the tourist's post-consuming reactions.

Situational environment is defined by the presence of relatives, friends, work colleagues or other persons at the moment of the purchase decision or during the journey. For example, a person will react differently in the presence of his boss and in the presence of a colleague; a child will react differently in the presence of his parents or teachers, and in the presence of his friends; during a journey a person acts differently if he/ she travels alone.

The state of mind has a direct effect on consumer behaviour. For a tourism agency, it is much easier to satisfy a client in a good mood rather than a nervous client.

Apart from these three categories of factors there is one more with great influence on consumer behaviour, consisting of **economic factors** such as: income per person, income per family, prices of products and services, salary, expenditure, GDP per person, inflation rate etc.

The economic factors are the most sensitive to environmental change and, as a result, they have been very affected by the economic situation of the past two years.

Between 2008 and 2010 the tourism industry registered a lot of changes which surprised even specialists of the domain.

3. Changes in the European Tourism Consumer Behaviour

Tourism plays an important role in the European economy, totalizing 1.8 million enterprises which operate in this domain and 5.2 percent from the total labour force works in tourism. Also, tourism contributes with over 5 percent at the European gross domestic product.

Therefore, it represents the third largest socioeconomic activity in the EU after the trade, distribution and construction sectors. Taking into account the sectors linked to it, the tourism contribution to GDP is even greater; being estimated to generate over 10 % of the European Union's GDP and provide approximately 12% of all jobs.

The European tourism has recently experienced a difficult economic situation.

In 2010, Europe's travel industry recovered compared to the low level from 2009, but the recovery is not as high as expected.

At the beginning of 2010, many countries reported mixed results regarding the number of visitors. Meanwhile, statistical data registered by airlines and accommodation units show that in the European tourism industry, the trend is ascending, but modest and it is on the track to recovery.

Another factor that contributed to the delay of the European tourism's recovery was the ash cloud from Iceland's volcano, a phenomenon which affected 6 million tourists in Europe in April and May, and which caused airlines 1.7 billion Euros net loss from sales.

The global economy is on track to recovery, being influenced by economies from Asia and America which register continual and considerable increases.

In Europe, many countries implemented austerity measures, delaying the economic

recovery perspectives, already weak. The euro and the pound fell in value facing the American dollar, but the possibilities to travel in Europe have increased for tourists from all over the world, with special offers and low price vacations.

The low income, the economic and financial instability reflected in the bankruptcy of prestigious firms and banks; natural disasters such as Iceland's volcano and the crisis from Greece had a negative impact on the European consumer, especially regarding tourism consumption.

Given these conditions of economic instability, the European tourism consumer has changed his behaviour looking for shorter trips, special offers and discounts, short distance trips, eventually city-breaks.

Also, tourists have become very careful when spending money for travel. They are willing to assign a smaller amount of money to travel than in previous years, and they want to be sure that they benefit of the maximum of services.

In the European Union, tourism operators adapted the offer on demand by decreasing tariffs to attract tourists. For example, hotels in Frankfurt lowered tariffs up to 36 percent, in Brussels tariffs have decreased by 30 percent, while in Athens and Berlin tariffs have decreased by 21 percent.

Tourism agencies promote cheaper tourism packages and special offers. The early-booking concept became very popular because tourists prefer to pay in advance for a trip in order to benefit from a discount. Also e-tourism has developed a lot because tourists can create their own tourism packages on the internet, at the desired costs.

The business segment remains very affected without encouraging perspectives for recovery.

Leisure tourism remains more demanded than business tourism, and this trend will continue. Due to the drastic decrease of business tourism, operators have opted for

an aggressive marketing for leisure tourism.

For example, reducing the demand on the corporate and conference sector during the summer season provoked huge decreases regarding the profitability of hotels from all over Europe. Hotels from Paris registered a 66.8 percent occupation rate in August, with nearly 10 percent less than the last twelve month average. In Brussels, the occupancy rate was 52.8 percent in August, with 12 percent less than the last twelve month average.

The difficult background of the tourism industry has highlighted a number of challenges which the European tourism sector must face. It is essential that all operators in the tourism sector combine their efforts and work together in order to increase its competitiveness and to ensure its sustainable growth.

Tourism is an economic activity with an important impact on the economic growth and employment in Europe. Being an activity which affects cultural and natural heritage and traditions and contemporary cultures in the European Union, tourism becomes an example of the need to reconcile economic growth and sustainable development.

Tourism is also an important instrument which can be used to reinforce Europe's image in the world, projecting its values and promoting its attractions, which are the result of centuries of cultural exchanges, linguistic diversity and creativity.

4. Changes in the Romanian Tourism Consumer's Behaviour

According to a recent classification, regarding competitiveness in tourism, made by the World Economic Forum and which includes 139 countries, Romania is situated on the 63rd position, occupying the last position of the European Union countries.

Because of its already weak position on the European market, Romania faces a

very difficult situation regarding tourism industry.

In the context of European Union operators reducing their tariffs, Romania, which is a country lacking both infrastructure and services quality, faces a difficult challenge: to acquire the ability to reinvent itself regarding the infrastructure and also the service offer. The purpose is to achieve a similar European standard infrastructure and to offer quality services at competitive prices.

Romanian tourists reduced the budget allocated for travel. If in 2008 lots of tourists took loans in order to go on vacation, in 2009 and 2010 their behaviour changed considerably. They think twice before taking a decision, regarding the fact that the amount of money used for the vacation can be used in other purposes. Some even gave up the thought of vacation. The departures of Romanians abroad, registered at the frontier, were 7.8 percent lower in the first eight months of 2010 with than in the same period of 2009. Also, the arrivals registered in collective tourism accommodation decreased by 3.7 percent and the number of nights decreased by 10.8 percent in the first eight months of 2010 compared to the same period of 2009.

Romanian tourism operators adapted to the new conditions, by considerably decreasing tariffs.

Tourism agencies sold, in the first nine months of 2010, 2.5 million vacation packages, achieving a similar level to the same period of 2009, but income decreased by approximately 25 percent due to the fact that most tourists bought cheaper and shorter vacations.

Hotels from Bucharest decreased their tariffs at half the value of 2009. The price per room for an overnight stay decreased below 100 Euros, even at five star units.

The patronages of balneal tourism plan to re-launch programmes with lower tariffs such as: "One week of recovery in balneal

resorts” and “The balneal decade”. These programmes address all social categories.

Hotel operators from mountain resorts and rural areas lowered the tariffs comparing to 2009 and continue to lower them in order to attract tourists even in off-peak season.

The number of Romanian tourists who spent their holiday at the Black seaside has decreased. Romanian tourists who spent holidays at the seaside chose shorter stays.

The Romanian tourism consumer is much more attentive regarding expenses. The low income, the rising prices, the instability of the work place, all these are reasons for which people think twice before deciding to spend money. Given these conditions, travelling becomes for many Romanians a luxury.

The optimistic part is that now it is time for the Romanian tourism to re-invent itself, to offer quality services at competitive tariffs. Also, the limited budget of Romanian tourists can encourage internal tourism. Romania can become a desired destination by foreigners, too, if offering quality services at lower tariffs.

Romania as a tourism destination has a big potential. From the Black seashore and the Danube Delta, to the beauties of the Carpathian Mountains, beautiful Transylvanian cities and villages and the painted monasteries, it is a country worth visiting.

It is a pity that these natural and cultural beauties are not promoted in order to raise interest and attract tourists.

The Romanian tourism should be supported by local authorities in the first place to build a proper infrastructure.

In the second place, tourism operators should be helped in order to overcome difficult situations such as, for example, seasonality and receive support, so as to have the possibility to practice lower prices.

Romania's image has suffered a lot of damage. Beside the economic collapse in which it is nowadays, the international mass-media overreacted and exaggerated all the negative aspects, because good news is not news.

Romania's image has to regain strength. Actions like building a positive reputation, finding an up-to-date identity for the country and developing and promoting a strong image brand should be prioritised. One of the beauties of imagining Romania is that one can endlessly rediscover it. It is almost chameleonic in the international imagination and it can be anything.

For the Romanian tourism, 2010 was as difficult as 2009, maybe even more difficult, being the second year of crisis.

Romania needs a serious introspection, which should result in a clear, strong and exciting image.

The hope for 2011 is that it will be a year of recovery for internal, incoming and outgoing tourism.

For the internal tourism, the special offer campaigns are expected to attract more tourists and for incoming tourism the new country brand is expected to have a high impact. For the outgoing tourism, it is expected that the present economic situation will be overcome and more people will afford to travel.

5. Conclusions

Consumer behaviour is a very important aspect to analyze in every marketing activity, especially in the tourism sector.

Consumer behaviour is influenced by many factors which can be grouped in categories such as personal factors, social factors, situational factors and economic factors. By understanding these factors, one can identify an individual's needs.

The tourism industry finds itself in times of uncertainty. In the period 2008-2010, the tourism industry faced difficulties,

triggered by the world-wide economic crisis.

Facing conditions of economic instability, the European tourism consumer has changed his behaviour looking for shorter trips, special offers, discounts and short distance trips.

European tourists became very careful when spending money for travels. They are willing to assign a smaller amount of money to travel than in previous years, and they want to be sure that they benefit from maximum of services.

European tourism operators adapted the offer on demand by decreasing tariffs and developing special offers to attract tourists.

Due to its already weak position on the European market, Romania faces a very difficult situation regarding the tourism industry.

Romanian tourists have reduced the budget allocated for travel and their behaviour has changed considerably. They think twice before taking a decision, regarding the fact that the amount of money used for the vacation can be used in other purposes.

Romanian tourism operators adapted to the new conditions, by considerably decreasing tariffs.

Although 2011 is expected to be a year of recovery for the Romanian tourism, Romania needs a serious introspection and

support in order to develop competitive tourism.

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