

ETHICAL TOURISM CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR AMONG STUDENTS STUDYING TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the tourism consumption behavior of students which study tourism in Romania. Therefore, we aim to examine students' attitude toward ethical tourism consumption and their intention regarding future ethical tourism consumption, the factors that would make students pay a premium for an ethical tourism products and those that might hinder their ethical tourism consumption behaviour. The paper relies on the cross-sectional survey as a research method, which was based on short self-completed questionnaire with 12 clear categories designed to help us answer our research questions and target a few socio-demographic characteristics. The questionnaire is based on the following variables: students' perception regarding the importance of ethical consumption behaviour and their intention to buy tourism products which sustain ethical consumption, factors that block students from consuming ethical vacations and factors that make students pay a premium for a responsible vacation. Overall, this paper contributes to literature by revealing if Romanian students that study tourism will act responsibly, ethically when it comes to their patterns of tourism consumption.

Keywords: ethical tourism; tourism consumption behavior; students study tourism

JEL Classification: M14, P12, L83, C83

Introduction

Beside a lot of articles that are trying to define responsible tourism or ethical tourism (Weeden, 2005; Gao, Huang, & Zhang, 2016; Stanford, 2008;) and others that are trying to find differences between those two concepts (Lansing and De Vries, 2007) there are a lot of studies related to different part of supply and demand. In line with theoretical aspects, Mihalic (2014) attempts to expand and refine the understanding of the sustainable-responsible tourism discourse and suggests how to close the sustainable-responsible gap by using clear definition of each term, derived from theories on environmental damage and behavioural economics.

Much of the literature focuses on the practices of responsible tourism covers various aspects of supply. A series of articles are related to tour operators (Khairat & Maher, 2012;

Tepelus, 2005; Budeanu, 2005) and their businesses. Aspects related to accommodation and ethical tourism represent another field of research for Han et al. (2011) and Boemi et al. (2013). Other studies explore actor relations such as the tourist-host population, and questions individual versus social responsibility as well as the political assumptions and governance models behind the responsibility (Bramwell et al., 2008; Hall, 2012).

Another part of literature focusses on studying various aspects of demand. Tourist's, perspective has dual roles of consumers of and participants in responsible tourism (Caruana et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2016; Stanford, 2008). Other researches on responsible tourism concentrate on the tourists' perspective and trends (Caruana, Glozer, Crane, & McCabe, 2014; Ramachandran, 2009). Chiappa, Grappi, & Romani (2016) and Weedon (2011) concluded that an individual tourist does not embrace every responsible tourism practice equally or place the same priority on each type of responsible tourism representing economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects. For most tourists, responsible tourism remains a noble idea but not a sufficient motivation to alter tourism plans and activities (Dodds, Graci, & Holmes, 2010; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014).

This paper intend to reveal the tourism consumption behavior of students which study tourism in Romania. By treating aspects like intentions of buying ethical tourist products, importance of different factors in choosing a destination and paying premium for ethical tourism authors intend to examine if students act responsibly, ethically when it comes to their patterns of tourism consumption.

Literature review

Weedon and Boluk (2014) acknowledge the shortcomings in the critical frameworks for reviewing ethical consumption in tourism. They also state that ethics holds a central position both in theory and practice in other disciplines. It can be consider that the current place of ethics in the tourism studies order of things may be characterized as marginal at best. But even this type of consumption represent a small part of the tourism industry the number of consumers who identify themselves as 'responsible' is a growing segment, and this growth is the consequence of increasing awareness about social, environmental, and/or ethical issues (Schrader, 2007)

Tilikidou et al. (2014) study shown a rather moderate to high overall intention of customers to stay at a green hotel and positive attitudes towards green hotels. It was found that more ethical future lodging customers are better educated than their counterparts are. They also hold rather positive attitudes towards the idea of staying at green hotels in a survey conducted among the 500 households of the urban area of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Kawal (2012) was interested in identifying whether college students perceived themselves to be ethical buyers assuming they have fair amount of educational background and awareness about social responsibility, concerns about environment, animal welfare, willing to pay an extra price for healthy options and so on. 210 students, from "International Marketing" in Delhi University, India took part in the 15 questions survey which was conducted over a two month period. Main findings of the study are: majority of respondents „were always willing“ to pay the amount of premium up-to 5 percent (accounting for 85.7 percent (0.857) variance); while making purchases in last one year, they „always look to support local shops and suppliers (accounting for 80.4 percent (0.804) variance); payment of extra price up to 5 percent is highly correlated with explicitly stated premium paid on final price of ethical products; while making purchases in last one year, they „always look to support local shops and suppliers“ (accounting for 80.4 percent (0.804) variance). As

regarding the barriers to ethical buying, respondents strongly agree that „there are not enough environmental products in the market“ (0.920) followed by second factor i.e. „many people have little inclination to pay a premium“ (0.904) and third factor „environmentally preferable products may not meet consumer criteria of price, performance, quality and easy access“ (.826).

Joo (2013) conducted a similar study which examined the relationship between people's attitude toward fair trade in commodity markets and understanding about and interest in fair trade tourism. Results indicate that there tends to be an upward increase in participant's willingness to pay the premium as their years of experience as fair trade consumers increases. On average participants with the shortest experience were willing to pay a 4.8% premium, while groups with the greatest level of experience were willing to pay a premium of 8.7%. Student's t-tests revealed a considerable gap between groups with longer than 5 years of experience and less than 5 years of experience. Arguably, participants' willingness to pay for premium will increase significantly, once their experience with fair trade experience exceeds five years. When asked about the activities they want their premiums be spent, the respondents rendered the greatest supports for 'enhancing women's and children's rights in destinations' (4.49). What followed after are 'ensuring fair wages and working conditions' (4.38) and 'supporting local development projects' (4.26). On average, respondents considered economic (4.65) and social (4.50) sustainability more important but still maintained their support for cultural (4.29), and ecological (4.02) sustainability.

Han et al. (2011) found that female customers of older age, who have favorable attitudes towards ecofriendly behaviors and positive images of green hotels, were more willing to stay at a green hotel, to recommend it and to pay more for it.

On Romanian market, Petrovici (2014) conduct a study to analyze the applicative role of public relations in the tourist sector, respectively, to identify the perception of the Romanian public of responsible tourism. Main findings related to perception of responsible tourism show that 42% of the respondents have heard about responsible tourism which can be seen as good practices in the tourist sector (38%), the exploitation and promotion of local products and services (37%), as well as protecting natural resources (25%). According to that paper, responsible tourism should aim, first of all, at minimizing the negative impact and, implicitly, maximizing the positive impact upon the tourism destinations (40%), generating increased economic benefits for locals and the tourist development of the area (32%), building a good relation between tourists and hosts by providing quality services, (28%). Most of those interviewed consider that, at present, responsible tourism may represent the most efficient strategy for promoting tourism in Romania, which demands the reconfiguration of the tourist sector by the adoption of responsible practices in this respect.

Methodology

Our paper research focus is on tourism consumption behavior of students which study business and tourism in Romania. We aim to examine if they act responsibly, ethically when it comes to their patterns of tourism consumption. Our argument is that those who study tourism should exhibit an ethical tourism consumption behavior based not only on their own values and beliefs, but also on the fact that they are exposed to an Ethics course during their studies.

Thus, our research questions are: What is the students' attitude toward ethical tourism consumption?; What is the students' intention regarding future ethical tourism

consumption?; What are the factors that would make students pay a premium for an ethical tourism product?; What might hinder the ethical tourism consumption of students?

Based on these research questions which intend to describe the attitude, intention and behavior of a large number of students, the best research method is the cross-sectional survey. This method involves „the collection of data at a single point in time from a sample drawn from a specified population” (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000, p. 225). This is the right approach under these circumstances because the cross-sectional survey allows to check the prevalence of certain behavioral characteristics in a population or to document the number of individuals who hold certain opinions or attitudes (Visser, Krosnick and Lavrakas, 2000). Surveys also permit to collect data on which to test some associations between the research variables.

The survey was based on a self-completed questionnaire to give students enough time to think about the right answers. Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2011) argue that such surveys are useful when the research topic is sensitive and respondents need time to ponder their answers. In order to be effective a self-completed questionnaire should be clear, simple and with easy to understand questions (Phellas, Bloch and Seale, 2011). Therefore, we formulated a short questionnaire with 12 clear categories designed to help us answer our research questions and target a few socio-demographic characteristics. These questions are based on the following variables: perception on the necessity of an ethical consumption behavior; factors that promote the consumption of ethical tourism products; intention to buy tourism products which sustain ethical consumption; factors that block students from consuming ethical vacations; factors that make students pay a premium for a responsible vacation.

At the beginning of 2017, the questionnaire was distributed online among the students of Business and Tourism Faculty within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE). A total of 147 questionnaires were filled-in. We consider this to be a representative sample based on the fact that we intended to study the attitudes and ethical tourism behavior of students who study tourism. In Romania only five other higher education institutions have programs specialized in tourism besides ASE. Therefore, we think that our sample of 147 is representative and can be used to draw conclusions on the population.

Results and discussions

The survey findings provide salient insights for further development of the ethical/responsible tourism market. Preferences of students and factors influencing their willingness to pay suggest ways to exploit currently ethical/responsible tourism markets. However, as this study targeted a limited number of individuals in a niche market, inferences based on the research results are, to a certain degree, limited.

The total number of respondents was 147, from which: 29 (19.4%) men, 118 (80.3%) women; 97 (66%) represents students in the second year at Faculty of Business and Tourism, BAES (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) while 50 (34%) represents students in the third year at the same faculty; the students' families monthly income is under 3000 RON for 47 (32%), between 3000-4500 RON for 48 (32.7%), between 4500-6000 RON for 29 (19.7%) and up to 6000 RON for 23 (15,6%).

In terms of students' perception regarding the importance of ethical consumption behaviour we found that 6 respondents (4.1% of answers) are neutral, 71 respondents (48,3%) considered important the ethical consumption behaviour, while 70 (47,6%) as very important.

When highlighting the level of the following factors' importance that promote the consumption of ethical tourism products, it was reported that (Table no. 1): with a mean of 4.29, Economic aspects (increasing income, creating local jobs, developing infrastructure, utilizing local products, reducing poverty) are considered as being the most important, the Cultural aspects (conserving traditions and cultural patrimony; minimizing cultural conflicts) come on the second place with a mean of 4.17, followed by Social aspects (fair working condition, equal income distribution, community empowerment, eliminating discrimination) - mean 4.01 and Ecological aspects (conserving biodiversity, utilizing renewable resources, reducing waste) - mean 3.89. With a median higher than the mean, to Ecological aspects was granted a high score by the respondents in terms of importance (4), stating what motivates them to consume responsible/ethical tourism products. When referring to homogeneity of responses, Economic aspects ranks first with a the lower standard deviation of 0.7348, this means that in accordance with the majority of the respondents, the importance of these aspects was rated 4, which means "important". The Social aspects reported the highest standard deviation of 0.89125, thus being at the opposite side. However, with a mean of 4.01 and a median of 4.00, that embedded the fact that the appreciation of the respondents is rather different, these aspects receiving a high level of importance – 4 as "important". The mode values of 4 determined by the high degree of importance attributed to all factors that promote the consumption of ethical tourism products show the high frequency of responses.

Table no. 1: Distribution indicators regarding the factors' importance that promote the consumption of ethical tourism products

		Ecological aspects (conserving biodiversity, utilizing renewable resources, reducing waste)	Social aspects (fair working condition, equal income distribution, community empowerment, eliminating discrimination)	Cultural aspects (conserving traditions and cultural patrimony; minimizing cultural conflicts)	Economic aspects (increasing income, creating local jobs, developing infrastructure, utilizing local products, reducing poverty)
N	Valid	147	147	147	147
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	3.8980	4.0136	4.1769	4.2993
	Median	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
	Mode	4.00	4.0000	4.00	4.00
	Std. dev.	.89125	.86564	.73480	.89125

Source: created by authors, based on research

When it comes to appreciate the measure of the students' intention to buy tourism products that support the following aspects in a destination (Table no.2), Cultural aspects reported the highest mean – 4.31, followed by Economic aspects - mean 4.1905, Ecological aspects - mean 4.0408, Social aspects – mean 4.0204. In respect with the consistency of answers, the first rank was occupied by Economic aspects (standard deviation 0.83857), meaning that, generally, respondents assessed that these aspects deserve a 4 rating (high). At the other end there were Cultural aspects (standard deviation 0.84300), but taking into consideration the mean of 4.04 and a median of 4.00, it means that students have a relatively different

perception regarding the measure of the intention in buying tourism products that support cultural aspects in a destination, but these aspects were placed on the high level (4). There was a great number of responses granting a high intention' measure to the all aspects (mode values were 5 and 4).

Table no. 2: Distribution indicators regarding the measure of the students' intention to buy tourism products that support the following aspects in a destination

		Ecological aspects (conserving biodiversity, utilizing renewable resources, reducing waste)	Social aspects (fair working condition, equal income distribution, community empowerment, eliminating discrimination)	Cultural aspects (conserving traditions and cultural patrimony; minimizing cultural conflicts)	Economic aspects (increasing income, creating local jobs, developing infrastructure, utilizing local products, reducing poverty)
N	Valid	147	147	147	147
	Missing	0	0	0	0
	Mean	4.0408	4.0204	4.3129	4.1905
	Median	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
	Mode	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
	Std. dev.	.84300	.84780	.85049	.83857

Source: created by authors, based on research

The research results also implies that ethical/responsible tourism advocates necessity to be more visible on the market (Table no.3). According to the answers of the respondents, Higher prices (mean 4.0544), Lack of information and reticently (mean 3.9932), Lack of transparency and credibility (mean 3.3988) and Concern about safety issues at destination are the most salient factors that block students for consuming ethical/responsible vacations. These factors even outweighed Distrust about tourism products' quality (mean 3.8231) and Lack of availability of ethical/responsible tourism products (mean 3.7347).

Table no. 3: Distribution indicators regarding the importance of factors that block students for consuming ethical/responsible vacations

		Lack of availability	Higher prices	Lack of transparency and credibility	Distrust about tourism products' quality	Concerns about safety issues at destinations	Lack of information and reticently
N	Valid	147	147	147	147	147	147
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Mean	3.7347	4.0544	3.9388	3.8231	3.9320	3.9932
	Median	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000	4.0000
	Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
	Std. dev.	.76146	.78323	.83768	.85769	.84933	.90279

Source: created by authors, based on research

To the majority of the above factors, respondents granted a high score in terms of importance, in this cases the median being higher than the mean, apart from the Higher

prices factor. Regarding homogeneity of responses, on one hand The lack of availability factor ranks as first with a standard deviation of 0.76146, which means that in accordance with the majority of the respondents, the importance of this factor was rated 4 - important. On the other hand, Lack of information and reticently reported a standard deviation of 0.90279, but taking into consideration the mean of 3.9932 and a median of 4.00, means that the appreciation of the respondents regarding this factor is not so consistent as The lack of availability's factor. The mode value of 4 determined by the high degree of importance attributed to all factors that block students for consuming ethical/responsible vacations shows the high frequency of responses.

The salient factors that make students pay a premium for a responsible vacation are Conserving natural environment (mean 4.2517) and Preserving traditions and local culture (mean 4.2381). These factors were followed by Supporting local development projects (schools, hospitals, roads) (mean 4.1020) and Supporting the use of local products (mean 4.0612). The least important factors reported were Supporting local development programs (for local guides) (mean 4.0204) and Guaranteeing fair wages and working conditions for local workers (mean 3.7823). To only Lack of availability factor, students granted a high score in terms of importance, in this case the median was higher than mean. More, the answers regarding the importance of this factor reported more consistent scores - standard deviation is the lowest 0.76146 - than the Lack of information and reticently' factor were the importance scores widely spread out from the mean (standard deviation 0.90279). There was a significant number of responses granting a high importance scores to the all factors that make students pay a premium for a responsible vacation (mode values were 5 and 4). More than 86% of survey respondents were willing to pay additional (till 10%) over the market price (a premium) for responsible/ethical products that influence the sustainable development of the destination. Only 11,6% were willing to pay more than 10 % premium while 2% were not willing to pay.

Conclusions

The main contribution of the paper is the analysis of the tourism consumption behavior of students which study tourism in Romania. We report that students find important the necessity of ethical consumption behaviour and economic aspects (increasing income, creating local jobs, developing infrastructure, utilizing local products, reducing poverty) are considered as being the most important factor that promotes the consumption of ethical tourism products. Also, students intent to buy tourism products that support the cultural aspects (conserving traditions and cultural patrimony; minimizing cultural conflicts) of a destination. Higher prices of ethical vacations are the most salient factor that blocks students for consuming ethical/responsible vacations and the significant factor that makes students pay a premium for a responsible vacation is the conservation of natural environment. These findings represents the base for the future research in order to test the association between the research variables such as intention to buy tourism products which sustain ethical consumption and factors that make students pay a premium for a responsible vacation.

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