
ASPECTS OF TOURISM CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The concept of tourism consumption has constantly evolved over the past decades by adding a series of attributes. The choice of destination originally started from a series of rational criteria and added emotional elements (image and perception, brand and trust). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the consumption behavior of the Romanian tourist when traveling abroad, by identifying the way of reserving the tourism services and the criteria for choosing the holiday destination. The results of the research show that the price is the main criterion for choosing the destination (average 4.27 and standard deviation 0.888), followed by destination security (average 4.25) and its accessibility (mean 4.23). Even though most Romanians prefer centrally located hotel units (average 3.39), when it comes to choosing their food units, they mostly focus on units frequented by locals (average 3.77). At the same time, during the holiday, the Roman tourist visits the main attraction points of the destination, being less interested in the secondary attractions. The results of the study outline the image of a calculated and informed tourist who tries to maximize the results (a higher tourist experience) while maintaining the travel budget at an optimum level.

Keywords

Tourism consumption, tourism behavior, tourism services, decision making process.

JEL Classification

O13, Q56, L8

Introduction

In the scientific literature (Cohen et al., 2014) there are a variety of studies and articles dealing with aspects regarding consumer behavior of tourists. The first mentions on this issue occurred during the 1980s and 1990s, but the subject was consolidated in the decades after 2000, thus settling definitions, structures, characteristics and strategies tailored to tourism and tourism marketing.

Although tourists can be categorized and segmented, it should not be forgotten that both the decision-making process and the attitudes and perceptions of tourism activity and its components are influenced by the individual characteristics of the tourists. Thus (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000), attitudes largely depend on the perception of individuals, the latter being a mental image of destinations, accommodation, food or entertainment. Another important element of the tourism consumption behavior through the decision-making process is the motivation, addressed both by the internal and external factors of the tourists. Last but not

least, the image of the destination is given by a set of perceptions, impressions and ideas that tourists have in relation to tourist products and potential destinations.

This article aims at presenting specific aspects related to the tourism consumption behavior of the Romanians, with special focus on the main elements of the touristic package, but also the decision making process regarding: choice of destination, means of transportation, accommodation units, catering, but also entertainment. The results of a questionnaire-based research highlight some of the main characteristics of the tourism consumer behavior of Romanians.

Literature review

The tourism consumption behavior (Boukas, 2014), through the decision making process in tourism, manifests itself on the model of the structure of the classic decision-making process, as follows: the emergence and assimilation of the need to travel, the increase of the level of involvement in solving the need, the search and the recognition of existing options, the assessment of alternatives to satisfy the assimilated need, the decision to purchase the services or the tourist packages, their purchase and the post-acquisition behavior.

Tourism consumption behavior (Cohen et al., 2014) includes a number of key concepts that are closely related to the decision-making process of purchasing a tourist service or visiting a particular destination. These include: decision-making, motivational factors, intrinsic characteristics such as perceptions, expectations and attitudes, but also trust and sense of loyalty towards a particular destination, activity, economic unit or service.

The classic decision-making model (Cohen & Avieli, 2015) advocates a causal relationship, from drawing up attitudes, to manifesting intent, to implementing a certain tourism consumption behavior. Thus, the decision-making process is considered to be one marked by rational and conscious elements. The main criticism of this model, and more precisely its adaptation to the tourist field, is that the decisions taken by tourists are much more complex than the classic model, given the multitude of micro-decisions that a tourist has to take (with regards to the choice of the destination, the accommodation unit, the way of organizing the meals, the entertainment, etc.); these decisions are made before and during the holiday, the latter being strongly influenced by a wide variety of situational factors. Thus, (Kivela & Crofts, 2006), alternatives are proposed to the classic decision-making model, namely the "set of options", which de facto represents a model focused more on results and less on the process.

The structure of the decision-making process for tourism activities includes the following elements (Maoz, 2006): the *motivational force* that produces the desire to visit a particular destination or to purchase a tourist product (the motors of tourism demand), the *ideas and images* formed in the mind of the tourist, on the basis of the knowledge acquired previously or at the time of this decision, about a particular destination (the effects of tourism demand), *the roles in the decision-making process* of family members or friends who are involved in the aforementioned process (determinants of tourism demand).

An important factor influencing the behavior of tourism consumption (Packer & Sutherland, 2011) is the image, and for its formation four distinct steps are traced. In the first stage, the image is heavily influenced by elements external to the tourist, among others: promotional actions, information available in the media and the Internet, the experiences of acquaintances. In the second stage, at the time of the decision to purchase a service or package to a particular destination, the image is interiorized, modified, adapted and assimilated by the tourist, according to individual characteristics and perceptions. In the third stage, during the holiday, the image undergoes new changes, in the direction of correcting some aspects and adding new elements. In the fourth and final phase, the post-vacation image affects and pervades the way of shaping future images, thus influencing the subsequent decision-making process and, implicitly, the tourism consumption behavior.

Another element of influence of the tourism consumption behavior is represented by the motivations of the choices made, which are in turn influenced by the tourist consumption values. In a broad sense, they guide a series of decisions about adopting a certain behavior, emotions, attitudes, etc. *Tourism consumption values* (Wang & Quan, 2004) tend to be more stable over time, with a more pronounced influence on attitudes or perceptions. Studies conducted so far have attempted to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between external values (related to the objective itself) and behavioral intentions. The criticism of these theories is related to the apparent forcing of this correlation, which may not be recognized by the tourist at a conscious level.

The correlation between motivations and other constitutive elements of tourism consumption behavior is carried out in studies on the influence of expectations and attitudes, emotions and perceptions in the decision making process.

Other aspects that characterize the tourist and influence his/her decision and consumer behavior include (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000): personality, self awareness, expectations, satisfaction, and loyalty to a particular brand/destination.

There is a consensus among researchers about how expectations (Baker & Crompton, 2000) are built, namely through past experience, through individual or non-individual communication, and by tracking non-personal communication sources, individual traits, such as the gender or nationality stereotype, attitudes and ways of motivation.

Recent studies (Cohen et al., 2014) on attitudes call into question their degree of stability in terms of situational factors; this way, the theories of predictive power of behavior, which focus mainly on certain attitudinal characteristics, which together with subjectivized norms, lead to a comparable behavioral intention, are questioned.

Knowing all of these elements in detail (Yeong et al, 2009) gives decision-makers and stakeholders involved in tourism the necessary information to adapt to the requirements of demand, but also to improve the services offered and thus the chances to lead a successful business. This information includes, among other things, consumer needs and motivations, the degree and direction of impact of the different promotional strategies, as well as the perceived risk of customers regarding the tourist destinations and tourist activities undertaken.

Methodology

In order to identify the main elements characterizing the tourism consumption behavior of the Romanians, a quantitative research was carried out in February 22-24, 2018, at the Romanian Tourism Fair. The target audience was formed by the visitors of the Fair, the interviewers selecting the people who agreed to respond without any other criterion of differentiation. Altogether, 251 questionnaires were completed, out of which 242 were valid. The variables used were: - the way of reserving tourism services, the responses regarded organized tourism and individual tourism, - the importance of the main criteria for choosing the holiday destination (destination security, diversity of entertainment alternatives, value of cultural objectives, price, destination gastronomy, diversity of accommodation units, accessibility of destination), - frequency of use of means of transport during the holiday journey, - preference for souvenirs, appreciation of their own tourist experience.

Results and discussion

From the point of view of age distribution, most of the respondents (26%) fall in the 35-44 age category, followed closely by those in the 25-34 years category (21.1%), the two cumulating almost half of all respondents. Of the total, 55% are women and 45% are men. Most (22.7%) receive revenues between 1500 and 1999 lei followed by 19.4%, who indicated incomes between 2000 and 2499 lei. 32% are married with children and 19.8%

have declared themselves "in a relationship". Regarding the level of education, most of them have university studies (54.5%). As regards the status on the labor market, most of them occupy executive positions (41.3%), out of which 24.8% are employed in the private sector and 16.5% are employed by the state.

The main findings of the research are presented below.

With regards to the *way of reserving tourism services*, the answers are distributed relatively balanced, a significant part of the respondents (57.5%) prefer the tourism organized by the travel agency and 42.1% prefer to travel on their own account and implicitly the own configuration of the package of accommodation and dining services. For those who choose to purchase through travel agencies, the 57.5 percent are almost uniformly distributed, 29.2% choose the package with the included meal compared to 28.3% who prefer only the purchase accommodation services.

The choice of holiday destinations is influenced by a number of factors, the first three places being occupied by the price (average of 4.27 out of 5 the maximum of preference), destination security (average of 4.25) and accessibility (average of 4.23). The other criteria obtained the following averages: the diversity of entertainment alternatives - 4.07, the value of cultural attractions - 3.99, the gastronomy of the destination - 3.73 and the diversity of accommodation units - 3.69. Also, 49% of respondents considered the price as very important, the standard deviation being of 0.888. An important score was obtained also by the criterion of accessibility, 47% considering it as very important, with a standard deviation of 0.904.

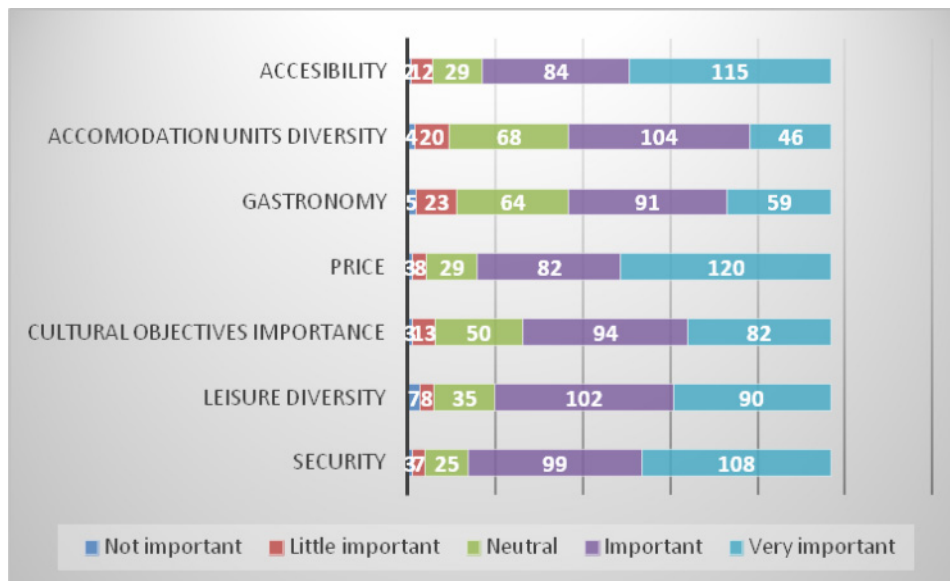


Fig. no. 1. Criteria in choosing a destination

Source: own data

Regarding the *means of transport* used on holiday (see fig. Nr. 2), the highest average was recorded by the air transport (3.24 out of 5 the maximum of preference) followed by the car (average 3.02), coach (average 2.81), train (average 2.58) and means of public transport at destination (average 2.57). A significant score was recorded by aircrafts, with 22% of respondents indicating that they always use it and 26.4% frequently. At the opposite end, 19.4% say they never use public transport at their destination.

Preferred accommodation facilities in holiday destinations are hotels located in city centers (average 3.39), 13.2% of respondents claiming to always use them. Accommodation in other

units in peripheral areas recorded the lowest average (3.05), 8.7% indicating that they never use them.

For *food services*, specialized units in the areas frequented mainly by locals (average 3,77) are preferred, and from the point of view of the uniformity of responses they record the lowest value of the standard deviation (0,876), 18,6% of the respondents always using them and 49.2% frequently.

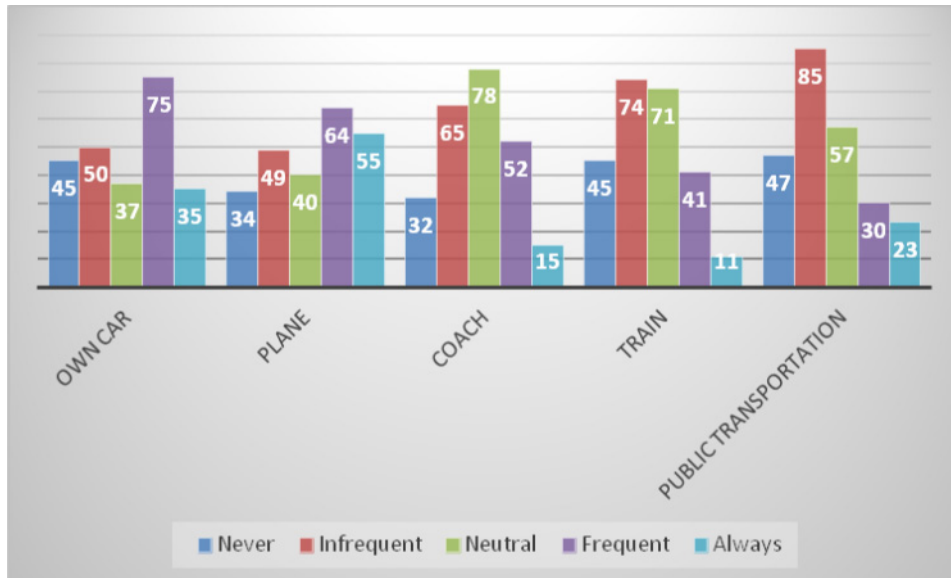


Fig. no. 2. Means of transportation used on holiday

Source: own data

The most appreciated *leisure facilities* (are those in the main tourist interest points (average 4.22) and, from the point of view of the uniformity of the answers, they have a low value of the standard deviation (0.902), 44.6% of the respondents using he always and 40.9% frequently.

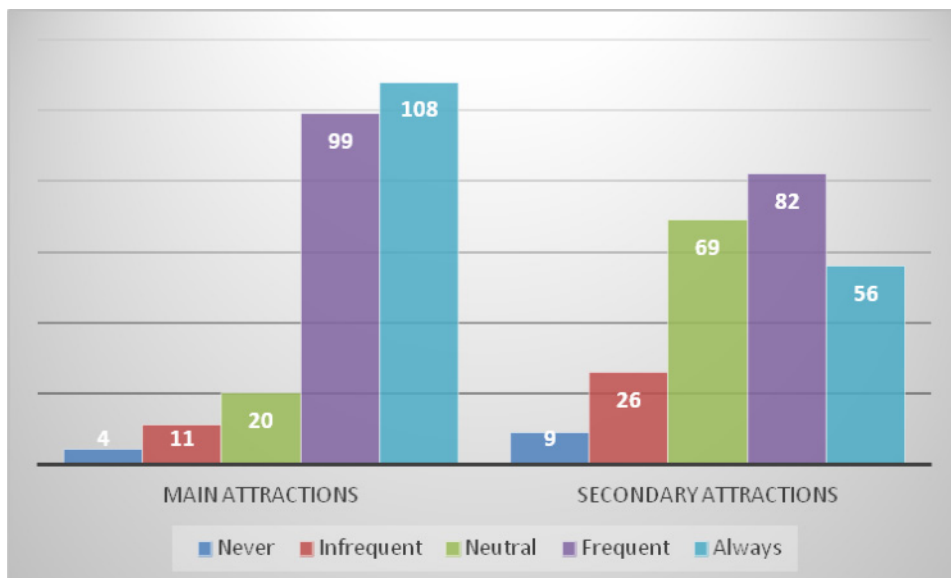


Fig. no. 3. Leisure facilities

Source: own data

From the category of *small souvenirs* (the question offered multiple answers), the most purchased are magnets and bookmarks (65.3% of the respondents), small manufacturing products (55%), local specific beverages (37.2% products of local gastronomy (32.6%) followed by products of well-known international brands (14.5%) and 4.5% are not interested in souvenirs.

On a scale of 1 (not related to tourism) to 10 (tourism specialists), most of the respondents appreciated their own tourist experience with 8 (33.5%), 7 (20.7%) and 9 (18.6%), indicating a satisfactory level of the indicator.

Conclusions

Over time, there have been many research concerns about tourism consumption behavior, based on a growing number of trips. More recent studies highlight a series of elements pertaining to the perception of tourists, the motivation of travel and the image of the tourist destination, aiming at identifying the decisive factors in the decision making process, the latter grouping into several defining categories: motivational force, ideas and images, functions in decision-making.

The quantitative research carried out within the Romanian Tourism Fair on February 22-24, 2018 focused on the objectives pursued, identifying the specific elements of the consumption behavior of the Romanian tourists, outlining some important aspects: balanced distribution of the modalities of reserving tourist services between organized and self-directed tourism, affirmation of price and security factors of destination as essential in the decision to travel, increase of preferences for food units frequented by locals.

The research approach of the tourism consumption behavior presents both theoretical importance, from the point of view of conceptual clarifications but above all practical, providing tour operators with information regarding changes in the consumption of tourists, which allows them to conceive tourism products adequate to the expectations of tourists. However, the research area is more general and does not include approaches that are likely to capture the investigation of the specific features of tourism services compared to other categories of services. On the other hand, many of the qualitative aspects of tourism consumption are not highlighted and these are the subject of future research, thus presenting the providers with a wider tool to improve the tourists' experience while ensuring satisfaction - a prerequisite for increasing competitiveness on a tourism market where competition is steadily increasing.

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