CURRENT PROBLEMS REGARDING THE RESEARCH OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM

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Abstract: Although the research of consumer behavior for tourism industry is vital, we will turn our attention in order to debate the main current problems regarding the research of consumer behavior in tourism: the data’s regarding consumer behavior, qualitative, and also quantitative, required by marketers from tourism and the problems involved by the collection and interpretation of this data. We will analyze further the two major problems of studying the consumer behavior in tourism industry. We dealt with obtaining the data for research and issues related to collecting and interpreting research data in tourism. We found that the research of consumer behavior is a complex field. The consumer research must not be the Cinderella of tourism and must become, instead, the milestone in taking decisions in the tourism industry. In the era of so-called "marketing dominated by consumer", when an organizations is told that must meet consumer demands if they want to flourish, it’s vital to understand tourists and what make them “work”.

Key words: consumer behavior, problems, tourism, research

INTRODUCTION

A major problem of the tourism industry represents the lack of reliable statistics, updated from this sector in most countries from the world. It is unknown the reasons why tourists do what they do or, alternatively, do not do what they would like the industry to do, although it is in discussion one of the largest industries from the world, also a constant of many national economies around the globe. In this respect it is necessary that the modern marketing rely on knowledge of customers and also anticipate and know their needs.

Although the research of consumer behavior for tourism industry is vital, however they do not make all necessary efforts in this regard. In this regard, we will turn our attention in order to debate the main current problems regarding the research of consumer behavior in tourism:

1. The data’s regarding consumer behavior, qualitative, and also quantitative, required by marketers from tourism;
2. The problems involved by the collection and interpretation of this data.

Unlike of the market research, marketing research is an applied research, based on action and involves collecting of data with the single intention to use them in order to efficiency the marketing activities of an organization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the research of the consumer behavior in tourism industry is needed of the research data directed toward different purposes, in order:
• identifying development opportunities of product;
• establishing the prices in report with the ones of the competition and with those on which the customers want to pay;
• ensuring an efficient distribution network;
• selecting of the best combination of promotional techniques and the most appropriate advertising mediums;
• market segmentation;
• adjustments made to services according to customer comments;
• reviewing and chancing of the trademarks and logos;
• taking the decisions in order of the investments in new facilities;
• choosing of the positions/locations of new hotels and theme parks;
• proposal of some diversification opportunities.

RESEARCH RESULTS

We will analyze further the two major problems of studying the consumer behavior in tourism industry, felt today.

1. THE PROBLEM OF OBTAINING THE DATA FOR RESEARCH

Tourism organizations claim a large variety of data about the consumers’ behavior of tourists, both qualitative and quantitative, regarding to:

• Statistical profiles of tourists. Many research projects collect information about the profile of the tourists visiting everything, from one country to a tourist attraction, in a certain period. Usually, these are demographic data’s and include:
  (a) age and sex of tourists;
  (b) the stage in which they are in the cycle of family life;
  (c) where they live;
  (d) their occupation and income.

• Statistical records of the tourists’ behavior. These data’s refer to:
  (a) where tourists like to go on holiday;
  (b) in what period from the year take their main holiday;
  (c) how much they really spend for the holiday;
  (d) how many trips they do in a year.

• How to take purchasing decisions by tourists. From the specific theory of consumer behavior is known that the process that sits at the basis of the purchasing decision taken is very complex one. It is obvious that the process differs for each tourist in part, as well as the motivational factors and determinants that shape the final decision.

• Who takes the purchasing decision. As in the case of the classical model of decisional process, marketing agencies must know who takes the decision, in a family or group, who travels, also must know on who to target with their promotional messages.

• When it taken the purchasing decision. The moment of taking the decision is important, this influencing the tourism organization regarding the including in plan of the promotional campaigns. An organization must know in what moment of the year are taken the most purchasing decisions of major holidays and how long before leaving on vacation.

• The consumer perceptions. The study of tourist perceptions is very important, because these are the ones that determine their behavior. So, travel agencies must understand individual perceptions about products, destinations, types of holidays and private tourism organizations. At the interpretation of perceptions, it is important to recognize the fact that they are often based on factors that are not related by the control tourism organizations. Meanwhile, the perceptions are often based on an old experience that is no longer relevant in relation to reality.

• Tourist satisfaction. The tourism industry must understand what determines whether tourists will be satisfied or not by the products offered by it. We need a diachronic research, which helps us to understand how increase tourists' expectations in time, to be always one step ahead of these expectations.

• Identifying trends from tourist behavior. We must identify trends of tourist demand, in order that tourism organizations to anticipate them and to develop new products according to them.
• **Segmentation criteria.** As more organizations adopt segmentation technique, appears the growing need for research that identifies the features of different market segments and allow the organizations to place individual tourists in the corresponding segments.

• **Positioning of the products in relation with the competition.** We need to know in what way tourists perceive the same product offered by several organizations and how they decide which to buy.

• **The attitude of non users.** If it is as an organization to gain new customers, it is important to know why the tourists do not purchase his products at the time. Then it may try to attract customers by changing the range of products.

• **Cultural and national differences in tourist behavior.** Given that many tourism organizations seek to sell products at international level, it is vital to understand cultural and national differences from marketing and tourism behavior. There are two kinds of differences:
  a) major - for example, variations of the data when it goes in the main holiday;
  b) minor - for example, attitudes towards services and the wish to benefit of certain types of amenities.

• **The link between tourism consumer behavior and the purchasing of other products.** People do not purchase the holidays in a particular way from the one in which purchase other products. Holidays are an extension of their lifestyle. Knowing this aspect helps tourism organizations to plan joint promotions, for example, those of a supermarket with an airline company.

Besides these there are other types of qualitative and quantitative data required by tourist organizations.

Although there have been registered progresses in recent years, there are still some weaknesses with general character in consumer behavior in tourism.

Perhaps some of them are avoidable, given the inherent problems involved by the collection and interpretation of research data in tourism.

These weaknesses of the research of consumer behavior in tourism are:

• Lack of diachronic studies, that allow us to research the development of the tourist behavior in time
• Many data are outdated and based on small samples of tourists and unreliable
• Collecting methods of tourist perceptions are underdeveloped.
• Often, data of the best quality are collected by organizations from private sector, they are sensitive in commercial term and are not available to everyone.
• Are missing the comparative data about national and cultural differences in tourism behavior.
• We don’t know enough about the way in which the tourists’ behavior is linked of the way in which they consume the products.
• There are too few mechanisms that allow the dissemination of data in a form usable by the specialists.
• The absence of reliable empirical data about motivations and determinants factors of behavior in tourism.

1. **PROBLEMS RELATED TO COLLECTING AND INTERPRETING OF RESEARCH DATA IN TOURISM**

It can identify many problems involved in collecting and interpreting research data in tourism, the main problems they encounter in the research are:
The existence of some difficulties of identification and measurement of tourism when tourists do not cross any national border, meaning domestic tourism. Usually, are not kept records of these movements, although they could represent most part of tourist trips toward destinations within the same country.

There is not a universal opinion about the period of time that someone must spend away from home in order to be named tourist. Standard definition requires spending at least one night away from home. In other words, exclude daytrips, which constitute the overwhelming proportion of visits to theme parks.

When are interrogated, tourists can give inaccurate information either deliberate, either accidental:
(a) misleading of the person who takes the interview, because they don’t want to insult saying that they don’t liked the product of a company;
(b) lie about activities developed in holiday, because they are ashamed of them;
(c) do not remember, honestly, how much they spent on vacation or exaggerate the amount, to give the impression that they are richer than in reality.

Also, for tourists is very difficult to answer to some standard questions frequently put, such as:
(a) when and where you first heard of this destination?
(b) you will use this airline in the future?

The problem of the moment in which to be put the questions. To ask them about:
(a) their plans when they go on vacation?
(b) their experience as they are on vacation?
(c) their memories, when they returned from vacation?

It is very difficult to find a representative sample of tourists for all tourists, from several reasons, including:
(a) the problem of seasonal character of tourism demand means that different types of tourists and nationalities will use tourism products at different times of the year, so the studies conducted in a certain moment could miss entire market segments;
(b) tourists are individual persons and also individual are their decisions, so how could be representative a sample?
(c) those who take interviews will prefer to put questions to the people that seem them friendly, sexually attracting or speaking the same language. This can lead to a partial sample.

In qualitative research field, the problems are magnified. It requires knowledge and psychological experience to generate effective responses to complex questions like: "Why did you choose this holiday?"

Usually, such a question receives an answered that only reflects conscious thinking, for example, the price. However, there may be many reasons rooted in the subconscious when is choosing a holiday, very important, but, possibly overlooked.

Besides the two major problems with which are facing the research of behavior in tourism, there are other issues that arise:

The fact that the most valuable marketing data are not ever made public. They are collected by organizations for their own purpose and are kept secret because of their commercial value for the organization.

A part of research data of public sector, although available for public are scarce, perhaps because they frequented in "political" purposes, for example, to justify a a budget increase of some departments.

When the research are doing the professionals in marketing, they may be inclined:
(a) either to formulate questions so that the answers do not suggest that it would not be done right their duty or either to demonstrate that they would have done it too well;  
(b) hide the results or discredit the research, if the result criticize the current marketing practices.

- Marketing research of quality is expensive, and when budgets are small, it's often the first that is cut. Although cutting may have a short-term impact, its effects on long-term can be immeasurable.

2. TRENDS OF THE RESEARCH OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM

Researchers from tourism field believe that in the next few years, the research of consumer behavior must be developed in order to become more efficient, on the following directions:

1. Developing more elaborate methods of collecting quality information in tourism, possibly including: focus groups, observation, and user journals and not protocol conversations with tourists.
2. The increased use of secondary and individual sources. It should use more the indirect and secondary sources, among which:
   (a) wider dissemination of academic researcher’s work and of the report elaborated by organizations like MINTEL and Economist Intelligence Unit. There is a clear role official tourism organizations.
   - At international level we talk about Insights Magazine, which belongs to English Tourist Board Marketing Intelligence organization, which is a good example as a mechanism for dissemination.
   - At European level, we talk about the European Journal of Tourism Research.
   - In Romania, the market of research in tourism has began to develop timidly, existing in this purpose: National Institute of Research - Development in Tourism - INCDT Bucharest, TOURISM MAGAZINE - STUDIES AND RESEARCHES IN TOURISM, Organization of Marketing in Tourism from Romania ( OMTR), Association of Academic Research in Tourism and Services CACTUS, which is a journal of the Academy of Economic Studies, in which it seeks to capitalize the best practices and research of the results from tourism field.
   (b) the use of feedback about consumer behavior and perceptions from intermediaries like travel agents;
   (c) the organizations should systematically analyze their business environment in terms of political, economic, social and technological factors that influences the behavior in tourism.
3. Research related to satisfaction. In this age of words from specialized jargon like "quality and marketing determined by consumer", more attention is given to the issue of tourist satisfaction. In terms of market research, the implication of the concern for tourist satisfaction plays an important role for:
   (a) the research which helps us to identify where occur "critical incidents" in tourism and consumer reactions to them. Incidents can be the reactions of employers when it is affected the service delivery system, employees' reactions to complaints or special requests of customers and unsolicited spontaneous actions of the employer. The results of this research help organizations to improve the delivery of services.
   (b) the interviews with consumers before, during and after using the product. These interviews would highlight in what measure the product was raised to the level of expectation of the consumers and in which way might be affected their future purchasing behavior.
CONCLUSIONS

We found that the research of consumer behavior is a complex field. However, it is a vital activity, if it is that the industry to satisfy customers and to flourish. The consumer research must not be the Cinderella of tourism and to become, instead, the milestone in taking decisions in the tourism industry.

In the era of so-called "marketing dominated by consumer", when to organizations is told that must meet consumer demands if they want to flourish, it's vital to understand tourists and what make them "work".

We can conclude that the research in the field of behavior in tourism is weak in many aspects, especially the following:
(a) many quantitative data are old and based on small samples, which means that the results are dubious;
(b) the lack of sophistication in qualitative research of the way in which tourists take decisions and of the case for which they take that judgment

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