CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behaviour, either in tourism or other contexts of consumption, is a key indicator of the quality, effectiveness and suitability of work in tourism or other activities. Tourist behaviour occurs in the planning and implementation stages of the holidays, and also after the return home. In order for the tour operator or destination to assess the relevance of its marketing and operational approaches to the development, marketing and implementation of tourism activities, it is necessary to recognise the different forms of behaviour in each stage.

This article discusses the theoretical bases of tourist behaviour. Only by knowing the fundamentals of tourist behaviour, as well as knowing how to observe and measure them. Theoretical foundations are crucial in empirical research/the measurements of tourist behaviour, as they reveal the concepts that should be measured, and usually also the ways to measure them. This article will summarise the key features and useful values of theories that were most frequently tested in the context of tourism, as well as those that include concepts relevant to the behaviour of consumers in the context of tourism.

**KEYWORDS:** *Tourist Behaviour, Tourism, Characteristics, Typologies, Process*

INTRODUCTION

The behaviour of tourists is the most important indicator or predictor of future tourist behaviour. Taking into account the social role of the tourist, the behaviour of an individual tourist can also be an indicator of the behaviour of others. With their behaviour, tourists set the social norms of behaviour in the context of tourism. These norms are also followed by other consumers; those who do not yet engage in travel or tourist behaviours, as well as those who do.

Tourist behaviour is the context of consumer behaviour in the purchase, uptake and abandonment of tourist services. Services are considered to be intangible, which makes them more difficult to market. They also have an additional complicating factor, since they are generally located away from places where consumer behaviour occurs.

The nature of the tourism industry makes consumer behaviour in tourism more complex than in other fields. Figure no.1 illustrates the complexity and characteristics of tourism consumer behaviour. A number of studies about consumer behaviour of tourists have been conducted on the basis of the general consumption theories in the marketing field. Most of these studies concentrated on the factors influencing a tourist's consumption behaviour; how a tourist learns to consume and travel; how a tourist makes travel decisions; and what factors influence those decisions.
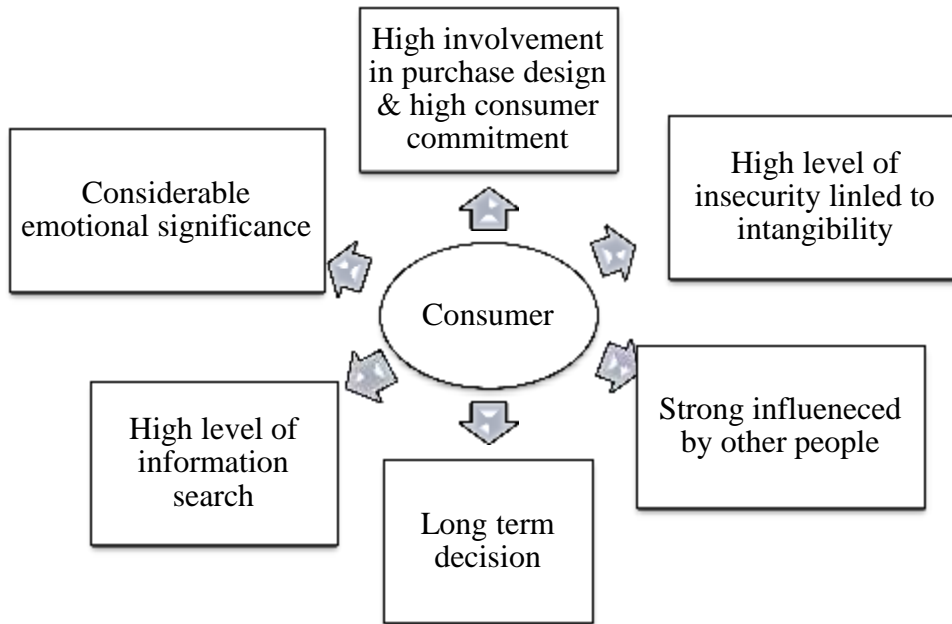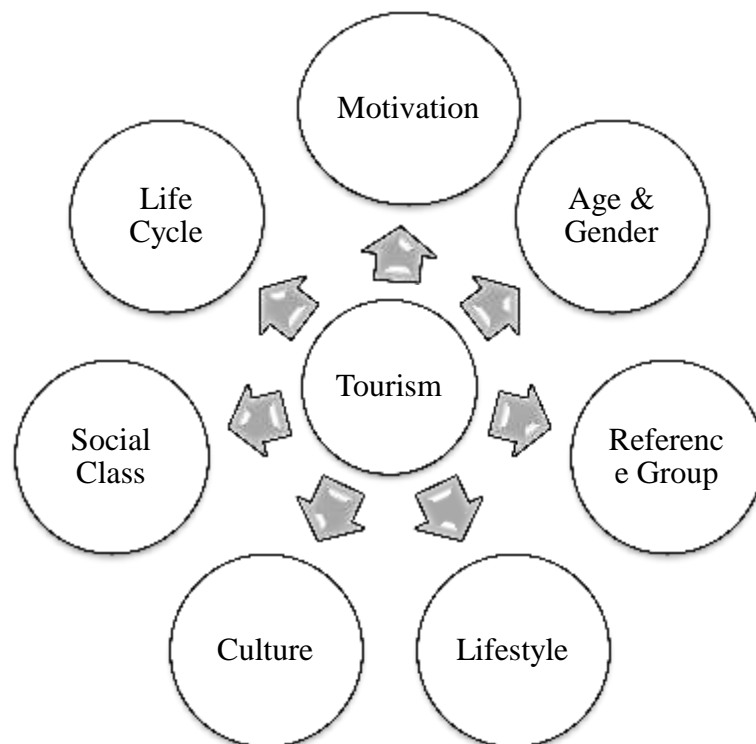
Fig No:1 Complexity & Characteristics of Consumer Behaviour in Tourism

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The seven key factors that influence a consumer's behavior. Motivation is often seen as a major determinant of consumer behavior, but cultural, personal, and social influences will also have an important effect on consumer purchases.

Figure No: 2 Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior

Motivations are inner drives that cause people to take action to satisfy their needs. Understanding consumer motivation is one of the most effective ways of gaining competitive differential advantage. Understanding the key triggers that lead to the purchase of a tourism or hospitality product, such as a visit to an attraction or a hotel booking, is recognized as one of the main factors in the success of competitive organizations. Central to most content theories of motivation is the concept of need.

Needs are the gaps between what customers have and what they would like to have, seen as the forces that arouse motivated behavior, and it is assumed that, to understand human motivation, it is necessary to discover what needs people have and how they can be fulfilled. Maslow, in 1943, was the first to attempt to do this with his needs hierarchy theory, now the best-known of all motivation theories Maslow's theory is that human needs are arranged in a hierarchy, from the most pressing to the least pressing; these needs, in order of importance, are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. One of the main reasons for the popularity of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is its simplicity. A person tries to satisfy their most important need first. When that need is satisfied, it will stop being a motivator, and the person will then try to satisfy the next most important need. It could be argued that traveller philanthropy is an outcome of the modern consumer seeking to satisfy self-actualization needs, since all the other needs in Maslow's hierarchy have been met.

Other factors influencing motivation and purchase include *learning, beliefs and attitudes, and perception.* **Learning** *refers to the way in which visitors receive and interpret a variety of stimuli.* People gain experience through taking holidays, by listening to others, and from a variety of other sources. From these experiences a consumer will develop a mental inventory of expectations about places – a catalogue of good and bad holiday experiences. These form the basis of learned criteria that will be recalled when selecting future holidays and destinations. **Beliefs** *refer to the thoughts that people have about most aspects of their life.* As far as tourism is concerned, consumers will have beliefs about companies, products, and services, including tourism offerings and destinations. Such thoughts can be positive, such as trust or confidence in a certain hotel or tour guide, or negative, such as a feeling about lack of security on airlines, or fear of injury on the ski slopes. **Attitudes** are more difficult to change, as they are *ingrained feelings about various factors of an experience.* Many people have a negative attitude towards flying, so airlines are attempting to convert non-flyers into flyers by holding special flying educational days to combat their fear. Similarly, theme parks hold seminars on combating the fear of rollercoaster rides – a session one psychologist described as helping people cope with their 'weaker self '.

Finally, **perception** *is an overall mind-picture of the world, shaped by information that people filter and then retrieve.* Thus, perception is inextricably bound to the concepts of bias and distortion. People choose to interpret different stimuli in different ways, ignoring some factors while enhancing others. This is known as selective perception. People often perceive tourism offerings in a way that compliments their self-image. In this way tourism products are viewed as bundles of benefits that are personal to the consumer. It is, however, through the technical factors (which are called 'significative stimuli') that the marketer can seek to change perceptions.

Marketers sometimes use a technique known as **perceptual mapping** *to identify the relationship between the level of perceived importance of certain aspects of a product or destination on the part of the tourist and the actual performance on the part of the supplier.*

Consumer attitudes are a consumer's enduring favourable or unfavourable cognitive evaluations, emotional feelings, and action tendencies toward some object or idea. As these attitudes and perceptions evolve, travel industry organizations must try to stay ahead without venturing too far off course.

Culture can be defined as the norms, beliefs and rituals that are unique to each person. These different factors influence how we live, communicate, and think about certain things; culture can also dictate how a person will act in a certain situation. In terms of self-image and the satisfaction of underlying tensions, most people seek to satisfy their desires in a way that fits societal norms.

A complete and thorough appreciation of the origins (geography, history, political economy, technology, and social institutions) and elements (cultural values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and ways of thinking) of culture may well be the single most important goal for a marketer in the preparation of international marketing plans and strategies. Cultural globalization is characterized by cultural homogenization as Western consumption and lifestyle patterns spread throughout the world, a process facilitated by the flow of travellers from the West to the developing world.

Other aspects of culture that are appropriate to motivational studies include languages, societal practices, institutions, and subcultures. The transmission of culture is primarily through the spoken and written word, but also through symbolic gestures, including the ways in which people expect to be greeted by others. Cultural practices include how we divide the day and our attitudes toward opening hours for shops or restaurants.

A traditional way of segmenting markets has been by **age**. Many travel suppliers are today

targeting the growing senior market. This market is both lucrative and unique because it is less tied to seasonal travel, involves longer trips, and is not wedded to midweek or weekend travel, so it can boost occupancy rates for business and leisure travel operators. For the senior market, too, perceived value is much more important than price. After people retire, they may stay loyal to brand names they know best, but the price points will have to be suitable to a retirement income.

Social class is still considered to be one of the most important external factors influencing consumer behavior. Social class is the position one occupies within society, and it is determined by such factors as income, wealth, education, occupation, family prestige, value of home and neighbor-hood. Social class is closely linked to the existence of social institutions. The role and status positions found within a society are influenced by the dictates of social institutions.

Marketers are increasingly segmenting their markets by consumer *lifestyles*. Lifestyle analysis examines the way people allocate time, energy and money. Lifestyle analysis tends to exclude demographic traits, so researchers in marketing have combined demographic and psychological variables into a concept called 'psychographics'. Psychographic analysis attempts to measure people's activities, interests and opinions.

The concept of the family life cycle – the stages through which families might pass as they mature is based on the premise that when people live together, their way of life changes. Single people are likely to behave differently from couples, and if couples subsequently have children, their lifestyle changes more radically, as do their levels of financial and other commitment. Tourists may also change their behavior patterns over time, so if the life cycle model is used to predict behavior, then trends in consumer behavior need to be monitored.

Learning also takes place through sharing values and expectations with others in a variety of social *reference groups*, including the family, workplace etc. This brings exposure to a normative set of values, i.e., those that set a tone as to how we should behave morally in society.

TYPOLOGIES OF TOURISTS

Many tourism researchers have tried to explain tourist behavior by developing typologies of the tourists themselves. The tourist motivation model proposed by **Stanley Plog** (1974) is one of the most widely cited. According to Plog, travellers may be classified as allocentrics or psychocentrics. Travellers who are more allo-centric are thought to prefer exotic destinations, unstructured vacations rather than packaged tours, and more involvement with local cultures. Psychocentrics, on the other hand, are thought to prefer familiar destinations, packaged tours, and 'touristy' areas. Later, Plog changed these labels to more 'reader-friendly' terms;

specifically, psychocentrics became dependable, and allocentrics ventures.

Other tourism researchers have developed different typologies. Most are based on empirical data obtained from questionnaires and/or personal interviews. Cohen's typology (1972) – one of the first – proposed four classifications of tourists:
  i. the organized mass tourist, highly dependent on the 'environmental bubble', who purchases all-inclusive tours or package holidays;
  ii. the individual mass tourist, who is more autonomous and free than those in the previous group;
  iii. the explorer, who seeks new areas but would sometimes opt to step back into comfortable accommodation, etc.;
  iv. the drifter, who avoids any kind of 'tourist establishment'

THE BUYING PROCESS

Before discussing the buying process, it is important to recognize that various buying situations will have an influence on this process. First of all, consumers are likely to display various levels of commitment, depending on the nature of the purchase. It has been suggested that there are three such levels (Howard and Sneth, 1969):

  i. **Extended problem solving:** In this situation, such as the decision to take a long-haul holiday, the consumer is likely to have a deep level of commitment, to make a detailed search for information, and to make an extensive comparison of the alternatives;

  ii. **Limited problem solving:** In this situation, the consumer will have some degree of knowledge or experience already, but many factors will be taken for granted and the information search will be far more limited. A second holiday at a favourite skiing destination may be purchased in this way;

  iii. **Habitual problem solving:** This is a repeat purchase of a tried and tested short break or day excursion, which requires little or no evaluation. The purchase is made primarily on the basis of a previous satisfactory experience and a good understanding of the destination or brand name of the tourism or hospitality offering.

Role adoption will also influence the buying process, and it is proposed that there are five roles (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard, 1990)

  i. **Initiator:** The person who starts the purchasing process and who gathers information;

  ii. **Influencer:** A person or persons who express preferences in choice or selection of information – this can be a group of friends, relatives, or a partner.

  iii. **Decider:** The person who has the financial control and possibly the authority within a group of people to make the purchase;

iv.   **Buyer:** The person who actually makes the purchase, visits the travel agent, and
obtains the tickets, etc.; and

v.   **User:** The person or persons who consumes the purchase and actually goes on the trip.

CONSUMER BUYING PROCESS

The consumer buying process for tourism is often regarded as similar to that for other products and services. The assumption is that a consumer moves through a number of stages leading up to a purchase. The process begins with awareness, a stage that may be initiated by promotional efforts, by word of mouth, or through an informational search such as an online search. The next stage involves the buyer obtaining more information, and as suggested previously, there are likely to be various levels of commitment depending on the nature of the purchase.

At the evaluation stage, the buyer will make more detailed comparisons. For example, a consumer may consider a number of destinations and will choose based on criteria such as price, recommendation, convenience or convention. Subject to time and financial constraints, the consumer will then make the purchase.

Fig No.3 Consumers' Buying Process

- Awareness
- Information Search
- Attitude Development
- Evaluation
- Purchase
- Post Purchase Behavior
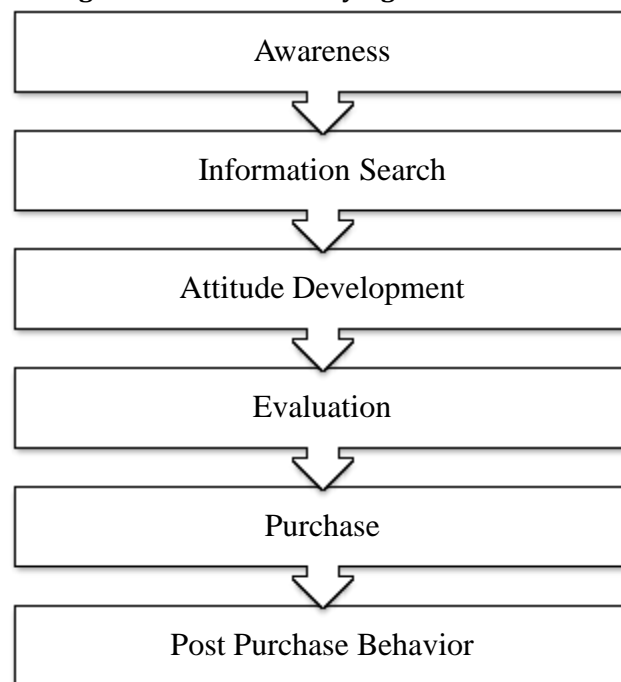
The majority of travellers prefer to book their vacations months in advance, but an increasing number of consumers are booking their trips on the spur of the moment, a phenomenon facilitated by the growth of the internet.

The purchase is followed by the final stage of the buying process, post-purchase behavior. If the experience is satisfactory, the visitor may purchase the same type of holiday in the future. Often the importance of this stage is underestimated, but several studies have examined the association between service quality and more specific behavioral intentions, and there is a positive and significant relationship between customers' perceptions of service quality and their willingness to recommend the company or destination to others (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

CONCLUSION

A marketer will also need to understand the buying phases for organizations. The conference market, for example, follows a pattern of group decision-making, and the 'buy phase' has been described as follows: problem recognition, general need description, product specification, supplier search, proposal solution, supplier selection, order routine specification, and performance review These buy phases sometimes take a long period of time, depending on the size of the conference or the complexity of arrangements, with lead times of two or three years in some instances and longer ones for mega-events.

The process is also affected by the nature of the purchase, as it can be a new purchase, a modified re-buy, or a straight re-buy. A new purchase involves a high degree of risk, as the client is buying a facility or service for the first time. A modified re-buy is less risky, as the client has bought a service offering before, perhaps at another hotel or conference centre within the group, but now seeks to modify the purchase. This might mean a new venue or new specifications for service levels. The straight re-buy is the least risky purchase situation, as it

involves, for example, re-ordering a service at the same venue.

Having identified the key decision-makers and phases in the purchase process, the marketer must then establish which criteria these decision makers have used to differentiate between suppliers. Webster and Wind suggest that four main factors influence the decision making criteria of organizational buyers: environmental, organizational, interpersonal, and individual. These factors are constantly changing, so it is essential to re-evaluate market trends frequently.

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