Knowledge of Tourists’ Behavior: A Key Success Factor for Managers in Tourism Business

T. Choibamroong

ABSTRACT

This paper presents how knowledge of tourist behavior plays an important role in tourism planning and marketing activities for tourism business managers. It analyzes the role of tourist consumer behavior and tourist typologies in globalization era. In addition, discussions on how knowledge of tourist consumer behavior can be useful in developing, promoting and selling tourism products are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Answering whether knowledge about tourists’ behavior is useful for practicing managers of tourism industries would involve a consideration of various important issues regarding current tourism trends. In general, tourism can be defined in behavioral terms as persons who travel away from their normal residential region for a temporary period of at least one night. Their behavior involves a search for leisure experiences from interactions with features or characteristics of places they choose to visit (Leiper, 1997). Referring the Leiper’s statement, it can be confirmed that understanding tourist consumer behavior is not merely of academic interest but doing so would provide knowledge for effective tourism planning and marketing. Although some writers (e.g. Meethan, 2001; Jelincic, 1999) consider that understanding the behavior of tourism consumers is less important in the globalization era since tourists tend to have very similar traveling habits, Douglas and Wind (1987) and Kean (2003) insist that the world is not yet globalized; therefore, tourist consumer behavior of each country is still different and needs to be understood according to the fact that there are many determining factors influencing travels’ supply and demand (Horton, 1984; Assael, 1995; Sharpley, 1996). Swarbrooke and Horner (1999, p. 3) state:

"The subject of consumer behavior is key to the underpinning of all marketing activity which is carried out to develop, promote and sell tourism products. Clearly, if we are to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities, we must try to understand how consumers make their decisions to purchase or use tourism products. If we understand their behavior patterns, then we will know when we need to intervene in the process to obtain the results that we want. We will know who to target at a particular time with a particular tourism product. More importantly, we will know to persuade them to choose certain products, which we will have designed more effectively to meet their particular needs and wants. An understanding of consumer behavior is therefore crucial to make marketing activity more successful."

Believing in the above concept, it is a task of this paper to prove if the above statement is correct. Therefore, this paper sets up a framework for in-depth analysis as follows:
The above figure explains that understanding consumer behavior is a critical means for succeeding in developing, promoting and selling tourism products. This paper therefore presents how knowledge of consumer behavior plays an important role in tourism planning and marketing activities. Additionally, as globalization has a significant role in shaping tourist consumer behavior (Jelincic, 1999), discussions will focus on its impacts to the tourism industry. Before presenting the analysis, definitions and concepts of tourist consumer behavior and globalization will be presented.

TOURIST CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN GLOBALIZATION ERA

McColl et al (1994, p116) define consumer behavior as ‘the actions a person takes towards purchasing and using products and services, including the decision-making process that precedes and determines those actions’. From the above statement, it is possible to say that actions carried out by persons (tourists) are very important for development of the tourism industry. Therefore, it is suggested here that in order to become a successful manager in the tourism industry, managers must be able to identify and understand consumer needs and wants and subsequently market programs that will satisfy those mentioned items (Anon, 1985). Given this, marketing managers must also pay attention to analyzing consumer behavior. This need has been recognized since currently consumers have been turning down what appears to be winning offers and have become more and more discerning when questioning and comparing products and services. Given the regard, it becomes clear that consumers’ behavior is never simple and is affected by many different factors, especially in globalization era.

Globalization here is described as the growing interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world through increased flows of goods, services, capital, people and information. Technological advances and reductions in the costs of international transactions drive this process. The result is a spread of technology and ideas, a rise in the share of trade in world production, and an increase in the mobility of capital (Munt, 1994). It is possible to say that by being influenced by the globalization process, tourists today have more motivations to travel, which directly affects tourist behavior (Pembroke, 1996).
Kotler (1999) shows that globalization has changed tourist consumer behavior as it has the capacity to create impacts on 1) cultural criteria (culture, subculture, social class), 2) social criteria (reference groups, family, roles and status), 3) personal criteria (age and life cycle stage, occupation, economic circumstances, lifestyle, personality and self-concept), 4) psychological criteria (motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes). Smith (1977) and King and Hyde (1991) point out that among the factors impacted by globalization, psychological factor of the tourists are considered to be the most important as it directly involves tourist consumer behavior. Smith (1978) and King and Hyde (1989) have formulated classifications of persons who travel, which are proved to be very useful for tourism planning and marketing (Kotler, 1999). The classifications are as follows:

Table 1. Valene Smith’s typology of tourists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Adaptations to local norms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Adapts fully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-beat</td>
<td>Uncommon</td>
<td>Adapts well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td>Adapts somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incipient mass</td>
<td>Steady flow</td>
<td>Seeks Western amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Expects Western amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>Massive</td>
<td>Demands Western amenities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Smith (1977)

Table 2. Classification of Tourists into Psychographic Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New indulgers</td>
<td>Escapists, seeking comforts and fantasies of pampered luxury; major motivation is to escape stress; are experiential more than acquisitive; trendies; want the good life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-tourists</td>
<td>Try to be seen as independent, non-conformist, and as the opposite of the symbols of ‘tourist’, which they avoid if possible; put very high value on authenticity; deep down they are insecure about status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big spenders</td>
<td>Heavily dependent on extensive and intensive service; want luxury and are prepared to pay more to get it; usually experienced and discerning tourists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New enthusiasts</td>
<td>Inexperienced tourists, eager for newness; energetic, mainly young and single; prefer resort holidays e.g. Sunlust for socializing and for active recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated Aussies/Kiwis</td>
<td>Nationalistic in narrow chauvinistic sense, they choose to confine their tourism to domestic itineraries, wanting to feel they know and are secure in their home country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-homes</td>
<td>These go on trips but want the destination to be much like home in its security; unimaginative, seek passive rather than active holidays; highly motivated by status of having been there, done that; sightseers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: King and Hyde (1989)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dalen (1989)                    | • Modern materialists want to get a tan to impress people when they get home. They like partying and are more concerned with drink than food. Hedonism is their main motivation.  
• Modern idealists also seek excitement and entertainment but want both to be more intellectual than the last group. They do not, however, want mass tourism or fixed itineraries.  
• Traditional idealists demand quality, culture, heritage, famous places, peace, and security.  
• Traditional materialists always look for special offers and low prices and have a strong concern with personal security.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| American Express (1989)         | • Adventurous, who are independent and confident and like to try new activities  
• Worries, who worry about the stressing travel and their safety and security while on holiday  
• Dreamers, who are fascinated by the idea of travel and they read and talk a lot about their travel experiences and different destinations  
• Economizers, who simply see travel as a routine opportunity for relaxation rather than as a special part of their life. As such they want to enjoy holidays at the lowest possible price  
• Indulges, who want to be pampered when they are on holiday.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Smith (1989)                    | • Explorers are a small group who travel almost as anthropologists  
• Elite tourists are experienced frequent travelers who like expensive tailor made tours  
• Off-beat tourists aim to get away from other tourists  
• Unusual tourists make side trips from organized tours to experience local culture  
• Incipient mass tourists travel to established destinations where tourism is not yet totally dominant  
• Mass tourists expect the same things they are used to at home                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Perreault, Dorden and Dorden (1979) | • Budget travelers who had medium incomes, but sought low-cost vacations  
• Adventurous tourist who were well educated and affluent and showed a preference for adventurous holidays  
• Homebody tourist were cautious people who took holidays but did not discuss their vacation with other people, and spent relatively little time planning it  
• Vacationers were a small group who spent lots of time thinking about their next holiday. They tended to be active people in lower paid jobs  
• Moderates had a high predisposition to travel but were not interested in weekend breaks or sports.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Cohen (1972)                    | • The recreational tourist for whom the emphasis is on physical recreation  
• The diversionary tourist who seeks ways of forgetting their everyday life at home  
• The experiential tourist who looks for authentic experiences  
• The experimental tourist where the main desire is to be in contact with local people  
• The existential tourist who wants to totally immerse themselves in the culture and lifestyles of their vacation destination.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Westvlaams Ekonomisch Studiebureau (1986) | • Active sea lovers who want to take a holiday by the sea, with a beach close by  
• Contact-minded holiday makers value making new friends on holiday, and being hospitably received by local people  
• Nature viewers want to be well received by the host population while enjoying very beautiful landscapes  
• Rest-seekers want a chance to relax and rest while on holiday  
• Discovers like cultural holidays and some adventure, but they also like to meet new people. |
• Family-orientated sun and sea lovers, who were the largest group, like to do things together as a family and seek ‘child-friendly’ activities
• Traditionalists value safety and security and try to avoid surprises by sticking with familiar destinations and types of holiday.

Gray (1970)
• Wanderlust itineraries tend to be multi-destination. They want to see and feel and learn what is unique, distinctive about specific places reflecting cultural needs rather than recreational.
• Sunlust depend on the individual’s motivation and tastes such as sun, snow, peace, noisy socializing, warm, cool weather, beautiful scenery, heavy metal music with lot of people raging all night.

Plog (1977)
• Plog sought to link personality traits directly with tourist behavior, and divided people up into psychocentrics, and allocentrics. He argued that the former were less adventurous, inward-looking people. They tend to prefer the familiar and have a preference for resorts that are already popular. Allocentrics, on the other hand, are outward-looking people who like to take risks and seek more adventurous holidays.

Source: Modified from Swarbrooke and Horner (1999)

Table 1, 2 and 3 clearly show that understanding the psychology of tourists is very important for tourism planning and marketing. It is also possible to say that different types of persons traveling also have different traveling behaviors. Therefore, holding the ability to understand each group of traveling people helps practicing managers develop, promote and sell tourism products effectively.

HOW IS TOURIST CONSUMER BEHAVIOR USEFUL IN DEVELOPING TOURISM PRODUCTS?

Poon (1994) believes that tourists are the products of changing population demographics and are more experienced, flexible and independent-minded. Tourists have changed values and lifestyles, which affects tourist demand. Plog (1974) shows that most American tourists look for cultural and educational values while Singaporean tourists seek for novelty and business (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). Given this, most tourism products developed in USA are cultural and educational-oriented (Hobson and Ko, 1994). In Singapore, due to geographical limitations, most tourism products are business and man-made-oriented.

Elain Orr, general manager of the Hong Kong marketing office of Pacific Club, says that the profiles of the Asian traveler are changing. Asian people are looking for value-added holidays and prefer city holidays. The old travel purposes have been changed in Asia. Edward (1990) points out activities, such as shopping and eating out, are major attractions for Asian tourists at present. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that Hong Kong, Singapore, and Macau are currently the regional destinations visited (Kau, 1994). Due to this, it is not surprising as well that most tourism products (modern department stores and luxurious multinational restaurants) are mushrooming in Hong Kong, Singapore and Macau.

In western countries, the values of conservation, health, and nature are spilling over to travel and tourism in a major way. The European Travel Data Center shows that European travelers want nature to be prominent in their vacations (Poon, 1994). Take German tourists as an example. It is found that nearly 60 % of them said that the experience of nature was the most important reason for their main holiday trip in 1990 (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999).

Given this fact, it is found that many tourism-reliant countries have developed various tourism products such as spas, natural-based resorts, and eco-tourism destinations in order to supply the changing tourism demands. In this case, Thailand can be taken as an example. It is found that as a result of a current tourism trend in health-concerned tourism, Thailand has developed many spas and health-based tourism sites to supply the tourists’ demands (Circle of Asia, 2003). This shows an important role of tourist consumer behavior in developing tourism products. It is possible to say here that understanding tourist consumer behavior is very beneficial for developing tourism products in order to supply the tourism demand.

HOW TOURISM CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IS USEFUL IN PROMOTING TOURISM PRODUCTS?

In the globalization era, tourists tend to be concerned about safety, security, and health as a main consideration for travel (Jamieson, 2001; Klanarongran, 2001; Douglas and Derrett, 2001). Responding to these demands, many countries have attempted to promote tourism products particularly fashioned around health-based tourist attractions.

Take spas, a health-based tourist attraction in Europe, as an example. It is found that around 20 million people in Europe, including Russia, visit spas
Regarding the profile of European spa clients, Germans are Europe’s most enthusiastic spa users. More than 1.4 million Germans attend spas regularly and 13 million are occasional users (Cockerell, 1996).

Given this demand, the German government has been promoting spa tourism since 1995. By 1998, there were 330 spas in Germany. Spa promotion carried out by the German government, which is a result of the understanding of tourist consumer behavior, has positioned Germany as the country having the highest number of spas in Europe (See Table 4).

Table 4 Number of Spas in Europe, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Spas</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Spas</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Spas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>4519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech. Rep.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Smith and Jenner (2000)

The above information confirms that understanding tourist consumer behavior helps tourism-related stakeholders (in this case is the government) to know what tourism products need to be promoted in order to receive promising economic benefits. Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) and Henry (1987) conclude that understanding consumer behavior is a way to guideline all marketing stakeholders regarding what to promote and sell with less risk.

HOW TOURIST CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IS USEFUL IN SELLING TOURISM PRODUCTS?

Kotler (1999) reveals that the buyer decision process is composed of 5 stages, 1) Need recognition, 2) Information search (personal sources, commercial sources, and public sources), 3) Evaluation of alternatives (brand image of self), 4) Purchase decision (attitude of other, unexpected situation), 5) Post purchase behavior (cognitive dissonance). Each stage of each tourist typology will be different (Krippendorf, 1987). For example, backpackers may need a different level of recognition and different method of information search compared to mass tourists. Therefore all tourism-related stakeholders should understand consumer behavior of each tourist typology presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 in order to sell effectively.

It is not enough to only understand the buyer decision process of each tourist typology; appropriate approaches for service provision to each type of persons traveling is also a must for all tourism marketers. Although many writers (e.g. Poon, 1994; Kandampully, 2001) say that in the globalization era, technology can help improve service quality, using that technology as a means for improving services may not be suitable for some tourist typologies. Teboul (1988) points out that technology may be used in certain parts of service delivery but some parts still require human beings and the ‘human touch’ to provide services. Kennedy et al (1994) support Teboul (1988) that first-class travelers may require human-provided service rather than machines while mass tourists may prefer E-ticketing, as it is timesaving. Therefore, to provide satisfied quality services, the tourism product’s sellers need to understand the behavior of each tourist type.

CONCLUSION

Tourists are defined as persons traveling away from their normal places to other unusual places (Leiper, 1997). They can be classified according to their characteristics of travel or their so-called consumer behavior. Tourist typology is therefore a term used to identify how each group of traveling persons behave in the tourist destination. From all the information presented, it is possible to say that the knowledge about tourists’ behavior is not merely of academic interest but it also proves valuable information for practicing managers to be able to plan effectively. Understanding consumer behavior is very useful for developing tourism products. It is also an integral source of information for promoting tourism products and highlights how to sell tourism products particularly in this globalized era, in which the patterns of tourist traveling is highly influenced by global factors such as the mass media (Pembroke, 1996). In short, the study of consumers’ behavior is solely of not academic interest but it is also substantially beneficial when practicing managers have the need to know and respond to tourists’ needs and wants correctly.
REFERENCES


Dr. Therdchai (Ted) Choibamroong received a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Tourism Planning and Management from Department of Tourism and Leisure Management, Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, University of Queensland, Australia by International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS), granted by the Australian Government, Queensland University International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (UQIPRS) and Tourism and Leisure Management Departmental Scholarship, Master of Social Science (M. SOC.SC.), awarded with Distinction, in Tourism Policy and Management from Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS), School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom and Bachelor of Arts (BA. in English) from Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University. He is at present a Head of Sustainable Tourism Development, Travel Industry Management Division, Mahidol University International College, Mahidol University and Area-Based Tourism Research Manager for Area-Based Tourism Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, the Thailand Research Fund, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Royal Thai Government.