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Tourists' Recommendations: Socio-demographic Analysis

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Abstract

In tourism, information can be treated as the most important factor influencing consumer behaviour. Word-of-mouth is one of the possible ways to transfer information. It is a form of communication – through recommendations - which involves consumers discussing their experience after service consumption. The aim of this paper is to highlight the differences in the frequency of spreading information through word-of-mouth among consumers – tourists of different socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age and, education). The survey was conducted in the period from October to December 2018 on a sample that included 228 respondents from the territory of AP Vojvodina. Based on a literature review and research objective, three hypotheses have been set. The cross-tabulation method was used for testing the proposed hypotheses.

Keywords: tourism, consumer, recommendation, word-of-mouth, socio-demographic characteristics, cross-tabulation

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Introduction

Consumers talk to each other about various products. Among others, conversation topics include restaurants, music, films, fashion, cars, tourist destinations, etc. Such a type of communication makes a powerful impact on the purchase decision-making process, as the messages are convincing and come from credible and impartial sources (friends, family members, colleagues etc.). This is the so-called word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, that is, information on products services and experiences communicated orally from one consumer to another (Babin & Harris, 2012).

The subject of this paper is word-of-mouth communication in tourism and the way consumers, i.e. tourists communicate information – recommendations influencing the development of the image of a tourist destination on the one hand, and on the other, influence the choice of a tourist destination. The aim of the paper is to point the differences in the frequency of spreading word-of-mouth information between consumers of various socio-demographic characteristic. The research encompasses the so-called “organic” word of mouth when information transfer between consumers flows naturally when consumers enjoy the product and want to exchange their experiences with others. In addition to this form of word-of-mouth communication, there is also the so-called amplified, generated when marketers try to initiate and accelerate word-of-mouth in the existing circles of consumers (Babin & Harris, 2012).

Karliček et al. (2010) list the basic characteristics of “organic word-of-mouth communication: (1) It represents an intimate activity – in most cases, this communication includes only two to three persons; (2) it occurs in the existing personal networks – communication conducted with friends, family members or co-workers, rarely with strangers; (3) most of the word-of-mouth is positive, although negative word-of-mouth spreads much faster and achieves a more significant on consumers’ purchase making decisions; (4) a prominent place among the consumers is taken up by the so-called opinion leaders, market mavens or influencers – persons who become more influential than others in information spreading.

Motives moving consumers to word-of-mouth are numerous. Desire to help represents the primary motive (Smith et al., 2007). In addition to this, the motives mentioned include product involvement, altruism and self-enhancement (Sundaram et al., 1998). It must be noted that word-of-mouth also varies depending on the category of the product on which the information and recommendations are disseminated. Thus, consumers search intensively for information, i.e. recommendations in situations when they know the product insufficiently, see high risks, or are highly involved in decision-making processes (Wiedmann et al., 2007).

Compared to other products, tourist products are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty (Ishida et al., 2016). Also, tourist products belong to the category of high-involvement products, in view of high costs and a high degree of uncertainty. In such conditions, word-of-mouth features as a key aspect of decision making process and choice of tourist destination, as it reduces uncertainty and risk (Cox et al., 2009; Kinard & Capella, 2006). The main driver of word-of-mouth communicating in tourism is the quality of service and customer/tourist satisfaction (Chen, 2011; Lai et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2013). So, Lam and Hsu (2006) state in their paper that consumers are more likely to opt for a tourist destination if their friends, family members or co-workers have a positive opinion about it.

Although tourism marketers and managers strive to create a positive and attractive tourist destination image, there are also other factors influencing

development and choice of tourist destinations, such as word-of-mouth communication (Grubor et al., 2019). Tourist destination image comprises three components: 1) cognitive component – beliefs and knowledge that consumers have on the tourist destination; 2) affective component – feelings that consumers associate to the tourist destination and 3) conative component – intention to revisit the tourist destination and spread information and recommendations (Agapito et al., 2011; Bosque et al., 2009; Pike & Ryan, 2004). It follows from the above that word-of-mouth communication influences formation of the cognitive component and the conative component of tourist destination image and, as such, represents the most dominant and most influential source of information in the process of creating tourist destination image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Ishida et al., 2016).

Methodology

The paper presents a part of research testing the existence of differences in socio-demographic characteristics of consumers (gender, age and education level) by frequency of recommendations (personal - word of mouth) regarding the choice of a tourist destination. The research was conducted in the period from October to December 2018 on a convenience sample including 228 respondents of different gender, age and education levels from the area of AP Vojvodina. The first two sections of the questionnaire were used for the requirements of writing the paper – the section consisting of questions related to socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and section consisting of questions related to personal recommendation. Table 1 gives the presentation of the sample.

Table 1
Characteristics of Respondents (n=228)

Characteristics		Number of respondents (n)	Structure (%)
Gender	Male	57	25.0
	Female	171	75.0
Age	up 30	195	85.5
	31-45	26	11.4
	46-65g	7	3.1
	+65	-	-
Education	Elementary education	-	-
	Secondary education	73	32.0
	Higher education	155	68.0

Source: the authors' calculation

Sample structure is such that female respondents prevail (75%) a significant share of respondents included in the sample are up to 30 (85.5%), whereas the number of respondents aged 46 to 65 is the lowest (3.1%). The majority of respondents have higher education (3.1%), whereas the majority of respondents (32.0%) have secondary education.

The following hypotheses were set based on the literature overview and research objectives:

H₁: Frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of tourist destination differs according to respondents' gender.

H₂: Frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of tourist destination differs according to respondents' age.

H₃ Frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of tourist destination differs according to respondents' education level.

Frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of tourist destination differs by respondents' education levels.

Hypothesis testing was performed by cross-tabulation method. The data were processed statistically applying software SPSS version 21.

Results

Testing hypothesis H₁ and establishing a difference in frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of a tourist destination by respondents' gender is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Testing independent variables: recommendations (personal) and respondents' gender

		Gender		Total	
		Male	Female		
Recommendations (personal)	several times/day	frequency	9	38	47
		% recommendations	19.1%	80.9%	100.0%
		% gender	15.8%	22.2%	20.6%
	2-3/week	frequency	15	57	72
		% recommendations	20.8%	79.2%	100.0%
		% gender	26.3%	33.3%	31.6%
	2-3/month	frequency	22	46	68
		% recommendations	32.4%	67.6%	100.0%
		% gender	38.6%	26.9%	29.8%
	2-3/year	frequency	6	21	27
		% recommendations	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
		% gender	10.5%	12.3%	11.8%
never	frequency	5	9	14	
	% recommendations	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%	
	% gender	8.8%	5.3%	6.1%	

Source: the authors' calculation

Based on cross-tabulation of category variables: recommendations related to the choice of the tourist destination and gender of respondents, it can be concluded that 9 male correspondents (19.1%) disseminate information on tourist products personally several times a day, 15 male respondents (20.8%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a week, 22 male respondents (32.4%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a month, 6 male respondents (22.2%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a year, while 5 male respondents (35.7%) never disseminate recommendations personally. As regards women, it can be concluded that 38 female correspondents (80.9%) disseminate information on tourist products personally several times a day, 57 female respondents (79.2%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a week, 46 female respondents (67.6%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a month, 21 female respondents (77.8%) disseminate recommendations 2-3 times a year, while 9 female respondents (64.3%) never disseminate recommendations personally. The majority of male respondents disseminate information on tourist products to other consumers 2-3 times a month

(38.6%), whereas women 2-3 times a week (33.3%), i.e. women disseminate information regarding the choice of tourist destination personally more often.

Based on the derived results of cross-tabulation, it can be concluded that women disseminate information personally more often, so that hypothesis H₁ is confirmed, i.e. that frequency of recommendations related to the choice of tourist destination differs according to respondents' gender.

Testing hypothesis H₂ and establishing a difference in frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of a tourist destination by respondents' age is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Testing independent variables: recommendations (personal) and respondents' age

		Gender			Total	
		up to 30	31-45	46-65		
Recommendations (personal)	several times/day	frequency	41	5	1	47
		% recommendations	87.2%	10.6%	2.1%	100.0%
		% age	21.0%	19.2%	14.3%	20.6%
	2-3/week	frequency	61	8	3	72
		% recommendations	84.7%	11.1%	4.2%	100.0%
		% age	31.3%	30.8%	42.9%	31.6%
	2-3/month	frequency	59	7	2	68
		% recommendations	86.8%	10.3%	2.9%	100.0%
		% age	30.3%	26.9%	28.6%	29.8%
	2-3/year	frequency	22	4	1	27
		% recommendations	81.5%	14.8%	3.7%	100.0%
		% age	11.3%	15.4%	14.3%	11.8%
	never	frequency	12	2	0	14
		% recommendations	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%	100.0%
		% age	6.2%	7.7%	0.0%	6.1%

Source: the authors' calculation

Based on cross-tabulation of category variables: recommendations related to the choice of tourist destination and age of respondents, it can be concluded that 41 respondents aged up to 30 (87.2%) disseminate information on tourist products personally to other consumers several times a day, 61 respondents aged up to 30 (84.7%) disseminate information personally 2-3 times a week, 59 respondents aged up to 30 (86.8%) disseminate information personally 2-3 times a month, 22 respondents aged up to 30 (81.5%) disseminate information personally 2-3 times a year, while 12 respondents aged up to 30 (85.7%) never disseminate recommendations personally. As regards respondents aged 31 to 45, it can be concluded that 5 respondents (10.6%) disseminate information on tourist products personally several times a day, 8 respondents (11.1%) disseminate information 2-3 times a week, 7 respondents (10.6%) disseminate information 2-3 times a month, 4 respondents (14.8%) disseminate information 2-3 times a year, while 2 respondents (14.3%) never disseminate recommendations personally. As regards respondents aged 46 – 65, it can be concluded that 1 respondent (2.1%) disseminates information on tourist products personally to other consumers several times a day, 3 respondents (4.2%) disseminate information 2-3 times a week, 2 respondents (2.9%) disseminate information 2-3 times a month, while 1 respondent (3.7%) disseminates information 2-3 times a year.

Results show that respondents aged 46 to 65 disseminate recommendations personally more often compared to younger respondents so that it can be concluded that hypothesis H₂ is accepted, that is, that frequency of recommendations differs by the respondents' age.

Testing hypothesis H₂ and establishing a difference in frequency of recommendations regarding the choice of a tourist destination by respondents' education levels is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Testing independent variables: recommendations (personal) and respondents' education levels

		Education level		Total	
		Secondary	Higher		
Recommendations (personal)	several times/day	frequency	18	29	47
		% recommendations	38.3%	61.7%	100.0%
		% education	24.7%	18.7%	20.6%
	2-3/week	frequency	27	45	72
		% recommendations	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
		% education	37.0%	29.0%	31.6%
	2-3/month	frequency	14	54	68
		% recommendations	20.6%	79.4%	100.0%
		% education	19.2%	34.8%	29.8%
	2-3/year	frequency	11	16	27
		% recommendations	40.7%	59.3%	100.0%
		% education	15.1%	10.3%	11.8%
	never	frequency	3	11	14
		% recommendations	21.4%	78.6%	100.0%
		% education	4.1%	7.1%	6.1%

Source: the authors' calculation

Based on cross-tabulation of category variables: recommendations related to the choice of the tourist destination and respondents' education levels is presented, it can be concluded that 18 respondents with secondary education (38,3%) disseminate information on tourist products personally to other consumers several times a day, 27 respondents (37,5%) disseminate information 2-3 times a week, 14 respondents (20,6%) disseminate information 2-3 times a month, 11 respondents (40,7%) disseminate information 2-3 times a year, whereas 3 respondents (21,4%) never disseminate recommendations personally. The majority of respondents with secondary education disseminate information personally information on tourist products to other consumers, as often as 2-3 times a week, 2-3 times a week, whereas respondents with higher education disseminate it 2-3 times a month (34,8%).

Based on the acquired results of cross-tabulation, it can be concluded that respondents with secondary education level disseminate recommendation personally more often compared to other respondents, so that hypothesis H₃ is accepted, i.e. that that frequency of recommendations differs according to the respondents' education levels.

Discussion and Conclusion

It has been established by testing the set hypotheses that there are differences in the frequency of disseminating information, i.e. recommendations on tourist destinations

depending on various socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Thus, it has been established that women are those who make a recommendation and participate in word-to-mouth communication more often, which concurs with the results of research by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and Agapito et al. (2011), who also concluded that women devote much more significance to word-of-mouth communication when choosing tourist destinations. As regards respondents' age, it has been established that respondents in the 46 to 65 age group tend more often to recommend destinations, personally. The assumption is that younger correspondents are more likely to recommend destination, i.e. participate in online word-of-mouth communication. Similar results were also reached by the above mentioned Agapito et al. (2011), whereas Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) do not notice differences in their results of research on information, i.e. recommendation dissemination depending on respondents' age. Finally, observing the respondents education levels, it has been established that respondents with secondary education level tend more often to disseminate recommendations for tourist destination personally. The obtained results, in the case of this socio-demographic characteristic, do not match the results of the compared research. In particular, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) do not notice differences in information and recommendation dissemination process depending on the respondents' education degree, whereas Agapito et al. (2011) reached the conclusion that respondents with higher education levels disseminate information and recommendations more often compared to respondents with lower education levels.

Word-of-mouth communication and recommendations represent one of the key factors of success for companies operating in the service sector. This stems from the fact that expectations related to delivered services are uncertain and unclear in view of the nature of services. So, different cultures, previous experiences and social environment may form different expectations from services (Cakir & Cetin, 2013). In this, consumers are under the strongest influence of their friends and families, with whom they live in the same conditions and who share approximately similar socio-demographic characteristics. On the other hand, for companies, word-of-mouth features as a very efficient method of promoting their products/services, as costs of it are non-existent. However, what could be a problem is the fact that once initiated, word-of-mouth about a product/service may change, and it may make both positive and negative impact on the company's performance (Hasan et al., 2012).

Tourism marketers and managers inevitably must realise the importance of word-of-mouth communication, and the potential that this mode of promotion has. The following step is to direct their activities to stimulate positive word-of-mouth.

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