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## Consumer behaviour examination in case of a package tour purchase: example of Slovak citizens

**Abstract.** Understanding of consumer behaviour is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage, keeping consumer's attention and achieving bigger market share. The authors examine consumer behaviour when buying a package tour on the example of Slovakia's population. Its objective is to identify observable processes that take place prior, during and after the purchase. Based on questionnaire survey, we evaluate how Slovak respondents gain information about package tours, we identify factors influencing a package tour selection and the mean and time advance of its booking, methods of payment, preferred services as a part of package tour and its evaluation in post-purchase phase. Research results outline options for tour operators' adaptation activities of to current consumer behaviour.

**Keywords:** Consumer; Consumer Behaviour; Package Tour; Tour Operator

**JEL Classification:** D11; L83; M31

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### **Оцінка поведінки споживача у випадку купівлі турпакета: на прикладі словацьких громадян**

**Анотація.** Розуміння поведінки споживачів має вирішальне значення для одержання конкурентних переваг, зберігаючи увагу споживачів і досягнення більшої частки ринку. У статті розглядається поведінка споживачів при покупці турпакету на прикладі населення Словаччини. Мета полягає в тому, щоб ідентифікувати спостережувані процеси, які відбуваються до, під час і після покупки. На підставі анкетного опитування ми оцінили, як словацькі респонденти одержали інформацію про тури, визначили фактори, що впливають на вибір пакета туристами, форму бронювання й час, який минає між бронюванням та початком проживання, способи оплати, яким надається перевага, а також послуги, що обираються як частина турпакета, і його оцінку після поїздки. Результати авторського дослідження допоможуть туроператорам більшою мірою адаптувати свою діяльність до особливостей поведінки споживачів.

**Ключові слова:** споживач; поведінка споживачів; туристичний пакет; туроператор.

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### **Оценка поведения потребителя в случае покупки турпакета: пример словацких граждан**

**Аннотация.** Понимание поведения потребителей имеет решающее значение для получения конкурентных преимуществ, сохранения внимания потребителей и достижение большей доли рынка. В статье рассматривается поведение потребителей при покупке турпакета на примере населения Словакии. Цель состоит в том, чтобы идентифицировать наблюдаемые процессы, которые происходят до, во время и после покупки. На основании анкетного опроса мы оценили, как словацкие респонденты получили информацию о турах, определили факторы, влияющие на выбор пакета туристами, и среднее время до начала его проживания, способы оплаты, предпочитаемые услуги как часть турпакета, и его оценку после поездки. Результаты авторского исследования помогут туроператорам адаптировать свою деятельность к особенностям текущего потребительского поведения.

**Ключевые слова:** потребитель; поведение потребителей; туристический пакет; туроператор.

**Introduction & Brief Literature Review.** In scientific literature a significant attention is paid to consumer behaviour as a key factor of successful orientation in the market. Various authors focus on food products (e.g. Carlucci et al., 2015 [1]; Daelman et al., 2013 [2]; Mohtar et al., 2014 [3]), recycled products (e.g. Jimenez-Parra et al., 2014 [4]; Michaud & Llerena, 2011 [5]), energies (e.g. Frederiks et al., 2015 [6]; Manjunath et al. 2014 [7]), but as well on tourism products, mostly in relation to development and use of information and communication technologies (e.g. Amaro & Duarte, 2015 [8]; Gao & Bai, 2014 [9]; Xiang et al., 2015 [10]).

Since tourism-related products, compared to everyday consumption products, have several specificities (grouping of diverse goods and services and interdependence of their producers, immateriality, time value, complexity and complementarity, volatility, possibility of substitution effect, seasonality), we decided to examine consumer behaviour when purchasing tourism products. In regard to the heterogeneity of tourism products (Bednarczyk, Malachovsky & Wszendybyl-Skulska, 2012 [11]; Tej & Matusikova, 2014[12]), we focus on package tours, thus a pre-arranged combination of accommodation, transportation, and/or other significant tourist services (Council Directive 90/314/EEC) [13], which represent its illustrative example.

In this context, a consumer can be defined as a person who takes or agrees to take the package ('the principal contractor'), or any person on whose behalf the principal contractor agrees to purchase the package ('the other beneficiaries') or any person to whom the principal contractor or any of the other beneficiaries transfers the package ('the transferee') [13].

A consumer is a bearer of consumer behaviour that can be characterized by openly observable activities in the process of purchase and consumption. These represent consumer's response to specific events, which are influenced by a number of stimuli (Kita et al., 2010, p.84) [14]. Pcolinska (2007, p. 601-602) [15] comprehensively define consumer behaviour as mental and social processes that take place prior to purchase (need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, alternatives selection) during purchase (buying behaviour) and post purchase (evaluation of utility, comparison of expectations and reality, satisfaction etc.). Consumer behaviour thus includes the way of selection, purchase and use of product which meets the needs and desires of individuals (Kotler & Keller, 2013, p.189) [16].

In last decades, many models of consumer behaviour have been constructed. Decrop et al. (2010, p. 21) [17] classified microeconomic, cognitive and interpretive models.

*Microeconomic models* are based on the demand theory. Consumer is understood as a rational being, which seeks to maximize the utility of his/hers choices with respect to the limited budget. Classical economics, that comprehend the consumer only through maximization of utility and sees the product as replaceable by another, as explained by the substitution effect, cannot adequately answer the question what makes each product so exceptional that it becomes the object of consumption. It is incapable to explain sufficiently consumer's reasons to favour consumption of one product before another. In addition, classical economics abstracts from the fact that current consumer, when deciding on consumption, does not always behave in a purely rational way (Simockova, 2013, p. 215-216) [18]. Decrop et al. (2010, p. 22) [17] therefore consider microeconomic models as partial, normative and dehumanized.

*Cognitive models* prioritize psychological factors. It is possible to differentiate between sequential, structural and process models.

*Sequential models* of consumer behaviour represent the decision-making process of individuals as a series of steps. Available literature (such as Decrop et al., 2010 [17]; Gucik, 2010 [19]; Kita et al., 2010 [14]; Kotler et al., 2007 [20]; Kotler & Keller, 2013 [16]) presents that the decision-making process consists in general of five stages (awareness of unmet need, thus a problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, post purchase attitude). Their recognition helps the product providers to enhance demand

and influence the consumer behaviour through targeted communication.

*Structural models* of consumer behaviour explain consumer decision-making process based on relationship between inputs (individual characteristics, marketing stimuli) and outputs (preferences, intent and product selection).

According to Decrop et al. (2010) [17], processes models do not only focus on analysis of relationship between inputs and outputs, but try to explain what is going on in the mind of consumer between the stimulus and the response to this stimulus. The black box model as the most famous model (Kotler et al., 2007 [20]) explains how consumer behaviour is affected by marketing stimuli inducing attention (4P), but also by other incentives characterizing the situation of purchase (economic, technological, political, cultural factors). These factors enter into black box shaped by buyer's characteristics and his decision-making process; as followed, these factors are transformed into a set of specific responses of consumers (product selection, brands, dealer, time of purchase and quantity of the product).

*Interpretative models* of consumer behaviour are less prescriptive and thus more realistic. According to Decrop et al. (2010, p.27 [17]) model of Woodside & McDonald from 1994 was identified as the first interpretative model based on a questionnaire survey. Their model classified decision (of purchase) of tourism consumers into eight subsets: selection of destination, accommodation, activities, attractions, means of transport, itinerary of the travel to primary destination, hospitality, secondary destinations, itinerary of visit of secondary destinations, souvenirs, resp. purchases. These selections are activated by four source elements – information search and use, interpersonal factors, marketing stimuli and travel intentions. The complexity of this model realistically describes a number of factors affecting consumer's final decision; however, in terms of marketing needs it is dysfunctional.

Available models of consumer behaviour rather deal with decision-making process than with individual's behaviour before, during and after the purchase. Consumer is perceived mainly as a rational being, and the hedonistic and experiential aspect of decision, which is typical for tourism products, is neglected. The fact, that holiday selection is undertaken predominantly in a particular social unit (family, couples, friends etc.) and not by the individual alone, is forgotten as well. In addition, most models of consumer behaviour applied to tourism examine primarily consumers choice of destination and of individual services (accommodation, transport, hospitality, etc.); in case of decision-making process in package tour purchase (as a pre-arranged package of services), it is inapplicable. When examining consumer behaviour related to package tour purchase, we understand the consumer behaviour as a set of processes that take place prior to purchase, during the purchase and after the purchase.

**Methodology.** The aim of this paper is to identify consumer behaviour when buying a package tour on the example of Slovak citizens. We pay attention to selected processes, which take place prior to the purchase (information search, factors influencing package tour selection), during the purchase (buying behaviour with focus on characteristics of selected product) and after the purchase (satisfaction evaluation).

Primary research of consumer behaviour was carried out between October 2013 and April 2014. The sample consisted of Slovak residents over the age of 15. The respondents were selected randomly.

Data obtained from 1813 questionnaires were re-coded and a data matrix was created using table processor Excel. During the control of sample representativeness (using Chi-square test in statistical programme PASW SPSS) 124 questionnaires were eliminated.

The final sample consisted of 1689 respondents. Due to the Chi-square test, this sample fits a representative picture of Slovakia by age (Asymp.Sig.=,902, Chi Square=1,596) and sex (Asymp.Sig.=,886, Chi Square=,021).

Obtained data were processed by mathematic-statistical methods using PASW SPSS. 5% significance level was identified ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

We found out that 15.9% of respondents (269) purchased the package tour at a tour operator in 2013. With a 95% of probability, we assume that it was equivalent to 14%–18% of Slovak residents over the age of 15. This result is equivalent to the findings of Flash Eurobarometer 392 – Preferences of Europeans towards Tourism [21], according to which one, 18% of Slovaks reserved their holiday via a tour operator. Further, we analyse their consumer behaviour.

**Results.** The information obtained from various heterogeneous sources represents consumers' first impulse leading to the purchase decision of a package tour. Based on responses of interviewed respondents who purchased a package tour in 2013, it is evident that individuals decided mainly on recommendations of friends and relatives (33.1%) having legitimizing and evaluation function, followed by tour operator catalogues (18.2%), the information published on the tour operator website (17.6%) and personal experience (14.0%), which, according to Kotler & Keller (2013) [16] are the most effective. A small group of respondents decided on the basis of holiday (4.5%) and discount portals (4.2%) that provide favourable prices of package tours or other stimuli (bidding sheet of tour operator sent online storefront tour operator, TV, etc.). Despite the massive use of information and communication technologies and current trends, only 30% of respondents considered the information communicated via Internet as the main source of information, leading to a purchase decision of the package tour.

As proved by One-Sample Kolmogor-Smirnov Test the test distribution is normal, therefore we used statistical induction to extend sample results on the population of Slovakia. With a reliability of 95% we may assume that while 25 to 35% of Slovak citizens, who purchased a package tour in 2013, obtained necessary information from the Internet, 65 to 75% used other sources than the Internet.

When gathering the information consumer learns about individual products. The individuals are generally aware only about a particular subset from the overall group of package tours available in the market. Only small number fits the initial purchase criteria and after a more detailed search, only few of them meets the expectations of consumer. It is therefore necessary to identify hierarchy of attributes influencing consumer's decision-making process.

We found that more than a third (34.2%) of respondents orientated in the package tour selection according to favourable ratio of quality and price; the tourism destination played a key role for a quarter (25.6%) of respondents, while the price was crucial for 17.1% of respondents. Factors, such as discount of original price (7.4%), quality of provided services (7.2%), offered combination of services (5.7%), reputation of the tour operator selling the package tour (1.8%), reputation of the package tour organizer (0.9%) or other (0.3%), were less important in the decision-making process.

As the tourism products are characterised by possibility, plus in case of package tours, the necessity of an advance purchase, we verified the length of time advance of a decision-making concerning a package tour purchase. More than a fifth (21.8%) of respondents considered the purchase 15 to 30 days before the package tour beginning. Almost the same number of respondents (20.4%) decided from two to one month before the package tour. Approximately 17.3% of respondents selected the package tour from seven to one day in advance and 3.1% even the day of package tour beginning, which means that these respondents profited from ultra-last minute. More than one tenth (11.7%) decided eight to fourteen days before the package tour and a similar number of respondents (11.2%) decided two to four months in advance. 14.5% of respondents decided in a longer time period (9.2% four to six months and 5.3% even more than six months before the package tour realization).

With a reliability of 95% we may assume that 41 to 51% of Slovak citizens who purchased a package tour in 2013, considered its purchase in a time advance longer than a month. 49 to 59% of Slovak citizens who purchased a package tour in 2013 decided in a shorter time advance; from which 27 to 37% selected the package tour less than two weeks before its beginning. Such behavior brings risk to tour operators who purchase services on the basis of guarantee.

Consumer's final purchase decision leads to selection of a concrete package tour. A package tour may be characterized mainly by time of product realization, its length, use of transport means, type of accommodation facility and range of catering and hospitality services.

Respondents who purchased a package tour in 2013, preferred mainly summer period (32.5% traveled to the package tour in August, 29.3% in July, 13.6% in June and 12.6% in September). Only 5.4% of respondents participated in a package tour from January to April, in May 4.1% and between October and December 2.6% of respondents. We assume that these were mainly sightseeing tours.

The biggest share of respondents decided for a package tour with length between 9 up to 12 days (46.8%) and between 5 up to 8 days (33.3%). 8.9% of respondents participated in short-time package tours (with maximum 4 overnight stays), while 10.9% of respondents participated into package tours with longer length over 13 days.

Half of respondents (50.9%) selected a plane when considering the means of transport, one fourth (24.3 %) preferred coach package tour, one fifth (20.5%) used own transport (car, motorbike) and only 2.3% used combined transportation, which is offered by tour operators less often than it used be in the past. Railway transport which stood by the origins of first modern tour operator was used in a minimal way (1.5% of respondents), followed by waterways transport 0.6%.

Even 70.5% decided for accommodation in a hotel, with predominance \*\*\*\* hotels (28.3%), \*\*\* hotels (21.5%) and \*\*\*\*\* hotels (15%). Respondents were less interested into hotels providing lower standard of services (1.8% of respondents preferred \* hotels, 3.8% of respondents preferred \*\*hotels). 10.3% accommodated person stayed at pension, 9.4% in the apartment house and 5.3% private accommodation. Respondents were merely interested into other types of accommodation.

We examined range of provided hospitality services included in price of purchased package tour. Results of this research proved preference of all inclusive, when customer pays the tour operator one sum for all services (included all-day meals, soft drinks and alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks), besides he/she knows the package tour price in advance (Table).

With a reliability of 95% we may confirm that 36 to 46% Slovak citizens, who purchased a package tour in 2013, preferred all inclusive package tour, 20 to 29% decided for half-board and 15 to 23% purchased a combination of services except hospitality services. We cannot assume that majority of respondents preferred all inclusive package tours in 2013.

The final decision is followed by reservation and payment for the package tour. Most often, respondents booked package tours personally at the premises of a tour operator that organized the trip (42.1%) or at the seller's premises (17.5%). Therefore it was confirmed, that despite a massive expansion of information and communication technologies existing custo-

Table: Range of provided catering and hospitality services included in package tour price

Range of catering and hospitality services	Share of respondents in %	Share of population (when statistical induction applied) in %
all inclusive (whole-day meals and drinks included)	40.7	36-46
breakfast	10.0	7-13
Full board (breakfast, lunch, dinner)	5.7	3-8
Half-board (breakfast, dinner)	24.9	20-29
Self-catering	18.6	15-23

Source: Own elaboration based on PASW SPSS outcomes



mers prefer personal contact ensuring the tour operator's credibility. Every tenth respondent booked the package tour via organizer's website, 7.5% via e-mail addressed to the package tour organizer, 3% via e-mail addressed to the intermediary and 2.8% booked it on another website as the package tour organizer's one. The remaining respondents were unable to identify the way of booking (10.8%), as it was provided by another person (relative, friend), alternatively they booked it by telephone (6.1%) or otherwise (0.3%).

Every fourth respondent paid the package tour in cash at the seller's premises. The reason can be found in settings of consumers' credit cards' limits that are not adapted to financially demanding purchases, as well as in insufficient equipment of tour operators by payment terminals. Almost a quarter (24.5%) of respondents made the payment transfer via Internet banking, 12.5% via credit card and 9.1% via transfer from the account. Other methods of payment (account deposit, money order, etc.) were used in minimal way.

In post-purchase phase, ergo after return from a package tour, consumer after the product consumption confronts his/hers expectations (created on gained information) with reality, ergo gained value. The bigger the difference between expectations and reality is, the deeper dissatisfaction is being recognized by customer which ends up in rejection of further package tour purchase offered by a concrete tour operator and customer's moves during following purchase.

We find it positive that 96.9% of respondents felt satisfied about their package tour in such a way they would recommend it to their friends and relatives. Only a negligible number of respondents (3.1%) expressed their dissatisfaction, while in case of 2.5% this annoyance lead to a claim. With a reliability of 95% we may await that 95 to 99% of Slovak inhabitants, who purchased a package tour in 2013, felt satisfied. 21.4% of respondents commented their positive or negative impressions from package tour purchase through social networks and travel blogs; while unsatisfied customers tend to share their attitudes more often.

**Conclusions.** Understanding and adaptation to consumer behaviour represents an occasion to gain relative competitive advantage and a successful performance in the market. In this paper, we focused on consumer behaviour research during a package tour purchase – a typical tourism product. The aim of this paper was to identify consumer behaviour when buying a package tour on the example of Slovak citizens, e.g. to identify observable processes, which take place prior to, during and after the purchase.

As proved by results of this research, in pre-purchase phase consumers gather necessary information predominantly from personal sources (family, friends and relatives), which are the most reliable after personal experience. The assumption that for majority of respondent's Internet was the principal source of information when considering package tour purchase in 2013 was rejected. Despite existing advantages of the Internet, personal recommendations are more valuable. With regard to the importance of personal recommendations, tour operators should publish consumers' references on their own website or social Medias, follow and react to them and thus motivate further Internet users to purchase a package tour of the tour operator in question.

Number of consumers who decide in a short time advance is slightly exceeding, such a fact influences negatively package tour operators' cash- flow. This type of behaviour may be explained by respondents' busyness, their worries about political and health situation in concrete tourism destinations, but as well by their speculative waiting about the package tour price reduction. Tour operators may fight against augmenting trend of package tour purchase at short notice with their price policy (emphasis of first moment discounts and bonus).

The final purchase decision leads to selection of a concrete package tour. In relation to augmenting demand after all inclusive package tours, which offer a higher comfort to consumers, we assumed that more than a half of consumers preferred this type of package tour in 2013. However, this assumption was not proved statistically.

In post-purchase phase, the consumer compares his/hers expectations with gained value. We assumed that a thoughtful package tour selection, which belongs to luxury goods according to economic theory, leads to a positive post-purchase attitude towards the product. Besides, it is a necessary precondition of next purchase. This assumption was statistically accepted. Tour operators may profit from this opportunity to intensify communication with consumers in favour of repeated purchases and purchases initiated by positive references. It is therefore important to reach consumers immediately after return from a package tour; herewith tour operator signals that it cares about its customers and about their satisfaction. An adequate personal support (friendly employees) and links of customers and businesses (creation of discussion forums- blogs, comments, message boards on tour operator's website, or social networks) may persuade customers to express their post-purchase opinion and attitude towards package tour, share it with other potential customers and thanks to an innovative approach (Mikhaylichenko, 2013 [22]) to increase tour operator's turnover.

Despite the fact that consumer behaviour is not a new topic in scientific literature, there has not been found a consensus about its evaluation. A large number of existing models, whose marketing application is questionable, confirm this situation. It is important that businesses regularly follow the way customers buy selected type of product, which factors influence the purchase consideration, which product do they prefer and whether they feel satisfied about it. This kind of information may be practically useful in the process of product's adaption and the whole marketing mix to customer's preferences. With regard to heterogeneity of customers' preferences, in further research it would be appropriate to use cluster analysis when identifying internally homogenous segments of customers (Kucerova, Marcekova & Nedelova, 2010 [23]).

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