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Tourism Consumer Behaviour

Chapter outline

A marketing orientation dictates all decisions are made with the interests of target consumers in mind. Consumer behaviour is the most important and complex issue faced by marketers. Attempting to understand the needs, motivations and decision making processes (*the why of buy*) of unique individuals in mass markets, is central to the development, implementation and evaluation of marketing activities. The chapter presents concepts about consumer behaviour that have practical implications for small tourism businesses. A five-stage model of tourism consumer behaviour is presented, commencing with the recognition of a need or want by an individual, leading to purchase decision making, anticipation and expectations, travel and on-site experiences and satisfaction, and culminating in post-trip reflections. This process is influenced by a range of internal and external forces. The main external influences discussed are destination attractiveness, culture and societal norms, and social networks. Key internal influences presented are individual consumers' demographics, perceptions, travel experience, personality, personal values, travel context and motivation. These personal characteristics are not static over time, since we re-arrange our thinking and attitudes over a lifetime as we learn from our travel experiences.

Learning aims

To enhance your understanding of:

- Consumer behaviour as central to the development, implementation and evaluation of tourism marketing activities.
- A model of consumer behaviour in tourism.
- The key internal and external influences on an individual's tourism buying behaviour.

Key terms

Consumer

The term is used to encapsulate existing customers, potential customers, and non-customers (those who have chosen to not purchase our service).

Needs, wants and demand

A *need* is something an individual has to have to satisfy a felt state of deprivation (e.g. a drink to quench a thirst), and a *want* is how an individual communicates a need (e.g. a green tea). A want plus buying power represents *demand*.

Motivation

Motivation for a tourism experience represents a *want* arising that can't be met at home. This should not be confused with the reason for the travel experience, such as 'to visit friends and relatives'. Tourism motivations can be physiological (e.g. relaxation), psychological (e.g. break from routine) or intellectual (e.g. to learn); and they generally relate to pleasure seeking, self-improvement or spirituality.

Introduction

A core theme throughout the book is that a marketing orientation, which is essential in the pursuit of a competitive edge in overcrowded markets, dictates all decisions are made with the interests of *target consumers* in mind. The term *consumer* is used to encapsulate existing customers, potential customers, and non-customers (those who have chosen to not to purchase our service). Theories on human behaviour are well established, and based on over a century of research in the psychology literature. However, while entire books disseminate the implications of such theories in the marketing context (e.g. Solomon, 2017) the study of consumer behaviour is not an exact science. We attempt to understand the minds and behaviour of unique individuals in mass markets. It is worth remembering the words of British philosopher Emerson Pugh who suggested that if the human mind was simple enough to understand, we would be too simple to understand it!

For an extensive review of the tourism consumer behaviour literature see Cohen et al. (2014). This chapter focuses on those aspects of buyer behaviour likely to be of practical relevance to marketers of small tourism businesses. The concepts introduced in the chapter underpin much of the discussion in other chapters.

While every human is a unique individual, in many aspects of tourism there will be a shared commonality of needs, motivations and behaviour. A model of consumer behaviour in tourism is presented in Figure 3.1, where there are five key stages in a tourism experience.

- 1 Needs and wants recognition
- 2 Purchase decision making
- 3 Anticipation and expectations
- 4 Travel to the service location/On-site experiences/Return travel
- 5 Post-trip satisfaction, memories and reflections.

The tourism experience commences with recognition of needs and wants, which are stimulated by a combination of external and internal influences. This model differs from that for many consumer goods products, where there might not be as much anticipation and/or return experience. Also, as can be seen, the consumer-traveller is not acting in isolation. Tourism is a communal activity, often acted out on a social stage. On one level the consumer becomes an influencer through sharing their experiences with other consumers and/or significant others in their personal life. On another level, the traveller creates impacts on society and the environment, through the travel consumption process and through encounters with service staff and interactions with fellow guests. For a comprehensive analysis of the wider implications of tourist consumption behaviour beyond the buying process see the work of Pearce (2013).

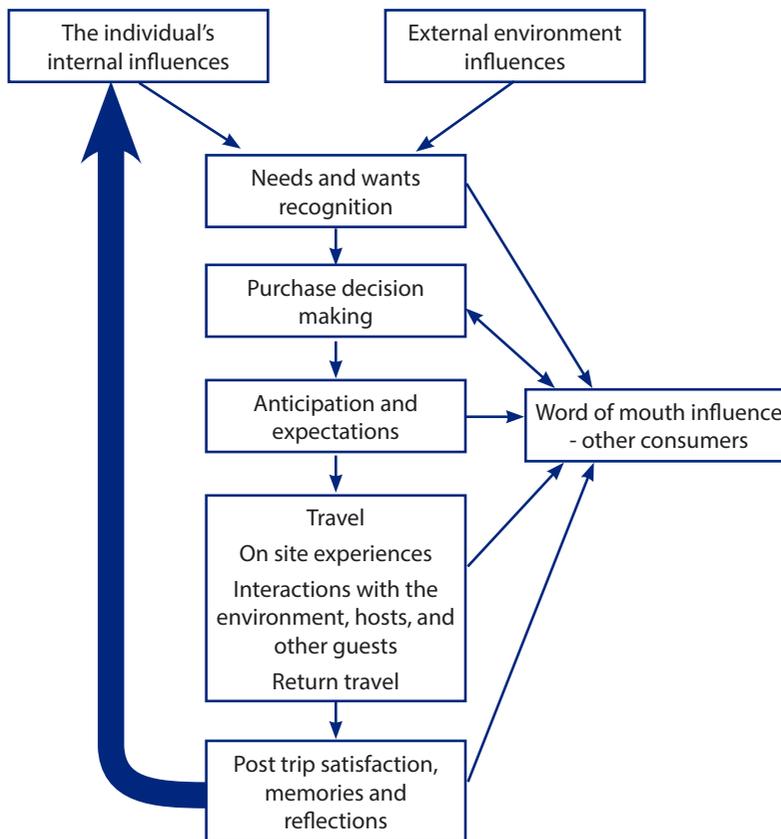


Figure 3.1: Model of consumer behaviour in tourism