
11 Listening to children as a tourism market: The Asian context

Zohre Mohammadi

The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Examine children as a significant growing market for tourism industry
- Focus on children's influence on family holiday satisfaction
- Evaluate the less positive experiences of families with young children
- Adopt the Orchestra Model of Tourism Experience for less positive experiences
- Highlight the main dissatisfaction issues for the family tourist market

Keywords: Children, family tourist market, less positive holiday experiences, travel constraints, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Introduction

Children constitute a major part of the global population and influence the family tourist market. Indeed, families are nearly universal social constructions in which children and parents spend most of their leisure and entertainment time (Webster, 2012; Lehto et al., 2009; Turley, 2001). As a result, it is not surprising that family vacations are considered a significant part of excursions around the world (Obrador, 2012; Shaw et al., 2008). The United States Travel Association (2009) has stated that at least a quarter of American family holidays in 2003 involved at least one child under the age of five. Similarly, Obrador (2012) and Carr (2011) note that families represent one of the largest markets for tour operators and other tourism service providers. The importance of the family to the tourism industry is illustrated by the

industry itself in the content of their marketing brochures. In fact, as Marshment (1997) pointed out some time ago, families are widely portrayed as the leading consumers in some tourism advertising, especially in relation to seaside tourism. The presence of children in travel advertising has become more and more popular today.

The importance of understanding the experiences of children in tourism not only relates to their presence among tourists, but also to their position as active social agents that can directly and indirectly influence their parents' shopping behaviour (Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020). The amount of personal income that many children have access to also makes them a potential and important tourism market that is worth studying. Further, children's holiday experiences are worth investigating because their lives, interests, and needs vary from those of adults. This study explores the experiences of families travelling with children in order to offer and market products and services to children and adults in a high quality way. The context for the work is the responses of families with children to attractions in Singapore. This setting provides a useful insight into the demands of many Asian markets since the available attractions ensure that children are frequent visitors.

Foundation ideas

Vacation and tourism experiences for children and families are built on the history of holiday demand and the nature of holiday provision for children. Given the ever-changing nature of children, it should be noted that children's and families' experiences of vacations provide analytical insights into the changing demand. It is important to note that children go through different stages of their lives and this fact needs to be considered when assessing the responses of the children and the adults who look after them (Carr, 2011).

Over the past decades, marketers and promoters of children's products have developed a vast array of strategies to reach young consumers (Kerrane, Hogg and Bettany, 2012). They are interested in the child market for three main reasons. First, today's children in Western and increasingly in some Asian societies have significant amounts of money to meet their needs and desires. The second reason is that children are the future market (Liu and Filimonau, 2019; Babb et al. 2017, Webster, 2012; Turley, 2001). It has been established that children develop a sense of loyalty to a brand at an early age, and that positive attitudes toward a brand persists until adulthood. A third reason underlying the marketing interest in children is that young family members are important influencers. They not only guide others in home based purchases such as snacks, pastries and breakfast products, but as they grow older, they also influence their parents' choice of restaurants, vacations, and new cars (Cullingford, 1995; Kang and Hsu

2005; Poria, Atzaba-Poria and Barrett, 2005; Blichfeldt et al., 2011; Carr, 2011; Radic, 2019; Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020).

Today, the power and impact of children on family decisions can be justified by the political-economic changes of recent decades. Parents have higher incomes and higher levels of education; they often delay childbearing and have fewer children, and there are more families where parents are the sole guardian (Yeoman et al., 2012; Gunter and Furnham, 1998). In general, these factors encourage parents to be more tolerant of their children and to take better care of them (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag and Cheah, 2015). A key factor that justifies the growing influence of children and family decisions is the liberalization of parent-child relationships in Western societies. A few decades ago, these patterns of child-rearing were characterized by power, obedience, and respect. However, equality and agreement about some decisions are important in today's families. The child-parent relationship is no longer regulated by power and order, but is influenced by negotiation (Yeoman et al., 2012). In modern Western families, children's views and their involvement in the decision-making process are important and taken seriously. In the past, children were never as powerful as they are today (Webster, 2012; Gunter and Furnham, 1998).

Three main concepts underpin this study: experience, satisfaction and loyalty. Tourism is an experience driven sector so studying the experience can be the key to access tourists' perceptions of value and by implication their future intentions. Many studies are based on positive feelings and on tourists' best holidays, which are valuable when considering the intention to return to a destination (Barnes, Mattsson, and Sørensen, 2016; del Bosque and San Martín; 2008; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) Nevertheless, a kind of reverse study can be helpful by researching the less positive or negative experiences to know what are the constraints and limiting factors that shape not going to a destination or not returning to the same place.

Taking a broader view, the current interest in children's perspectives is aligned with the way tourism scholars have tried to focus on marginalized groups in society (Tribe and Liburd, 2016). Families always have been under investigation in tourism studies but from the perspective of the adults. It is time to study family tourism by better incorporating the needs and, where possible, views of the growing market segment of children. Tourists' experiences can be analyzed in three stages: before the visit, during the visit and after the visit. Families with children have growing expectations and the tourism industry needs more effort to address their anticipations of travel and expectations (Liu and Filimonau, 2019). Recent work has begun to address children's expectations and motivations (Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020; Radic, 2019; Wu et al., 2019; Rhoden, Hunter-Jones and Miller, 2016;