

## The Influence of Brands on Consumer Behavior in Selecting a Travel Package

by

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*Abstract.* When selecting a travel package, consumers consider certain important criteria to identify the most suitable holiday according to their preferences, expectations, budget, time and mood. A series of factors occur in the selection process, related to the travel service providers, as well as the travel destination where the tourist has chosen to spend its free time. Whether related to the country, the selected travel agency, the transport company or any other company involved in the provision of services up to the destination and during its holiday, the consumer can choose between various brands available on the market.

The work aims to discover the influence held by the brands of companies that are active in the tourist sector, over the manner in which consumers choose a travel package, if it is available, and the extent to which it is a determining factor in selecting a provider in the detriment of others, or of a destination in the detriment of others.

The research that was carried out aims to capture the process of selecting a travel service package by tourists, the steps that are taken, the priority criteria to be considered, the significance of the brand in relation to such criteria and determining the influence of brands and of their associated values over the buying behavior.

*Key words:* brand influence, consumer behavior, tourism brands, tourist package

JEL classification: M31

### 1 Introduction

Brands play an important role in the life of people, whether from a marketing perspective or simply by underlining the utility of a brand name. The brand sets products, services and companies apart, and it can even impact the staff manufacturing the respective product or performing the service, since all the attributes associated with the brand will guide the production method and the spirit in which a business is developed.

Despite the fact that, apparently, the purchase selection criteria are practical, whether aware of it or not, the buyer makes a selection of the products it uses, based on how attached it is to an advertisement, a color, a slogan, a representative element, respectively to each part that more or less defines the brand of its favorite product. For example, if the priority and elimination criterion of a consumer is the price, it will only choose products that it can afford. However, despite the fact that it seems to be a relatively simple and restrictive selection, several brands providing the same

product in similar versions are found at the same price level (low, average, high).

### 2 Current state of knowledge

The analysis of product brand influence can be made through detailed research on the product characteristics, the knowledge of the brand by the consumer, the notoriety and market availability thereof at a given time. However, the human factor involved in the performance process interferes in the case of services, which has a determining influence on the impression made on consumers, concerning a specific brand.

Estimating the significance it has for the company, Sherry (2005) believes the brand is a performance, a source of inspiration and a hologram of the company, displayed to people. Thus, this underlines the fact that the brand is a contract and a relation between the company and the consumer, as well as a guarantee over all products released under its name or placed on the market.

Specialized studies have shown that, in tourism, there is a connection between the influences of

a destination on the tourist's experience and the latter's return to the respective location. Ekinici, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado (2013) have proven that tourists tend to revisit a tourist destination due to its symbolic characteristics and to the extent to which their self-image matches the destination's brand image.

Furthermore, in their study, Cretu and Brodie (2007) indicate that the brand image was defined as the mental image of the consumer (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990) and it includes symbolic meanings that the consumers associate with the specific attributes of the product or service. A fact that is also taken into consideration is the company's reputation, which was generally described as a combination of the stakeholders' assessments between "what the company is", "how well the company meets its commitments" and "how well the company's general performances meet the social and political environment" (Logsdon and Wood, 2002).

On the other hand, Hosany and Prayag (2011) underline the emotional responses of tourists upon encountering the provided products and, therefore, the triggering of specific emotional behavior, materialized by episodes characterized by strong feelings related to their experiences.

Despite the fact that the brand is an intangible element, it brings together under a name that is representative for the product all expectations, work, talent, innovative concept of the company's staff, as well as the created impression, the mental associations, feelings and reactions of consumers. They are all brought together and they form the baggage that sets the difference for the brand from other brands available on the market, making various approaches and selections from the moment the target client encounters the product.

The selection of a tourist package or of a holiday package is based on a process that involves material costs and time from the consumer, as well as the offer meeting countless brands available in the same sector, such as the brand of the tourist agency, hotel, carrier and other economic agents contributing to the

establishment of the full service package.

Concerning the strategic direction of tourist companies, it was established that they focus on the manner in which the company is adapted to the industry level and the relation created with the external environment (Avci, Madanoğlu and Okumus, 2011).

Keller believes that, for example, the availability of brand hotels can send a significant signal of the status of international destination, internationally, and the consumers' low perception of the capitalized brand value may improve and, thus, trust in the respective brand may increase due to the consumer's information and knowledge (Dioko and So, 2012).

The brand supports participants on the tourism market by differentiating the provided products, in a context where they are very similar and the only remarkable differentiation elements are the service provision level and the introduction in the tourist agency's offer of the highest possible number of collaborators providing varied services and indisputable quality.

### 3 Research methodology

The work is based on *quantity research*, made so as to study the brand's influence on the consumer behavior in choosing a tourist package. The research was made in March 2014, in Bucharest, during the performance of a tourism fair in an exhibition center.

The main criteria that had to be met by respondents were:

- to be between 18 and 65 years old;
- not to work in the following areas: written press, radio, TV, public relations, advertising, promotions, market research, marketing, tourism;
- not to have participated in another research on the same subject during the last 6 months;
- to have bought a holiday package at least once;
- to live in Bucharest.

The research instrument that was used was the *questionnaire*, and the acquired data were

registered electronically on the collection thereof.

The research procedure consisted of the centralization of data collected through the questionnaire, the grouping thereof according to the study's objectives, the interpretation of results, and the presentation, within the work, of information relevant to understanding the researched topic.

In terms of the sample size and structure, it was calculated based on the following the classical formula  $n = t^2 * P(1-P) / \Delta^2 \epsilon$ . For a probability of 95%,  $t$  is 1,96, the margin of error is  $\pm 3$  and  $p=0,5$ . The following sample resulted from the formula:  $n = 1.96^2 * 0.5(1-0.5) / 0.03^2 = 1067.11 \sim 1068$  respondents.

Considering the short term for the performance of the tourist fair, of only 4 days, and the dependence of the study's performance according to the number of visitors during that time, the research was based on a more limited sample, consisting of visitors participating in the event and meeting the target population.

The use of a random sampling method was decided for this research, respectively systematic sampling, in this case involving the selection of visitors every 10 minutes, on leaving the exhibition area.

The **research objectives** aim:

- To identify the sources of information used by the respondent in the information concerning the tourism package they are to procure;
- To establish the purchase frequency of a holiday package for each respondent;
- To establish the procured package type and the included services;
- To establish the time assigned to purchase a holiday;
- To identify the duration of the holiday selected by the respondent, based on the number of nights/holiday;
- To establish the methods of accessing a tourist package (independently/via a tourist agency);
- To identify the notoriety of the brand selected by the respondent in the case of the tourist agency;

- To identify the brand(s) of the tourist agency that the respondent chooses most frequently;
- To identify the brand(s) chosen most frequently by the respondent, upon selecting the "individual" version (hotel, transport, etc.);
- To identify the reasons determining the respondent to purchase a specific brand;
- To establish the most important criteria for the respondent in selecting a holiday package (price, accessibility, expediency, recommendation, offer variety, offer customization);
- To establish the significance of a tourist service provider's brand in relation to other important criteria in the selection process of a holiday package;
- To identify the availability of a relation of attachment or loyalty between the respondent and the tourist agency it turns to when choosing a tourist package;
- To identify the significance placed by the respondent on the tradition and longevity of a specific tourist agency;
- To identify the respondent's demographic characteristics (income, age, sex).

#### 4 Research analysis and results

The study respondents were selected so as to provide the most concrete answers possible to the research questions, based on their experience. To this extent, 3 eliminating questions and 2 trial questions were introduced at the beginning of the questionnaire, to verify whether they meet the target population or not. 5 partial questionnaires (only providing answers to the trial questions, respectively they did not meet the established age limits, or were not located in Bucharest, or worked in the listed areas, and determined the end of the questionnaire) were noticed following the end of the fair, together with 12 partially filled in questionnaires.

Overall, 235 questionnaires were filled in. Thus, having removed the questionnaires that did not meet the established criteria or that could not be

registered for data processing, 218 questionnaires were subsequently used to identify the research results.

Out of the 218 respondents, 58% are women, while 42% are men. A higher share of female respondents than male respondents is noticed. The reasons behind it are various.

On the one hand, there is a general trend at the level of the general population, concerning the increase of the number of women in relation to the number of men (INS Report, 2012). Another explanation is the fact that women dedicate more time to the organization of a holiday, compared to men, as they look for offers, compare them, carefully check the information they have acquired, collect data concerning the destinations they have chosen, the hotels and restaurants and, therefore, have a higher share in the poll. In terms of the sources of information they use, when deciding to purchase a holiday service package, respondents continue to mainly rely on traditional methods.

The sources of information used by respondents to find the adequate holiday are a starting point towards their direct or indirect encounter with the brands of tourist companies. Most consumers use tourist agencies as sources of information (64%), closely followed by recommendations received from friends (51%). On the opposite end, the least used sources of information for tourist offers are television (6%) and newspapers (2%), (Figure 1).

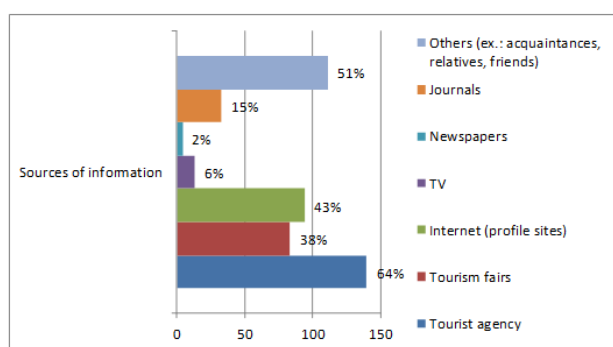


Figure 1. *The sources of information used by respondents to find the adequate holiday*  
(Source: created by the author)

The results are based on the fact that

respondents place a higher level of trust in an agency working in the tourism business, with tradition and a large number of clients, however, they particularly trust the recommendations they receive from their friends, as, if the latter were satisfied with the services they have received, they will also recommend the companies providing their pleasant holiday experience to others. The low shares obtained by sources of information such as television, newspapers and magazines (except for specialized publications) are justified by the fact that very few tourist offers are promoted in such media, and respondents do not trust advertisements alone, without also discussing with a tourist agent, for increased safety.

In order to measure a consumer's attachment to a brand, whether of the destination, of the tourist agency or another brand involved in the selection process, an important element is established by the holiday purchase frequency amongst respondents. Thus, most of them have answered that they purchase a holiday package twice a year (53%), during the winter or spring holidays, or during legal holiday/annual holiday periods, and the fewest have answered that they buy a holiday package more frequently than every 3 months (3%), when they feel the need to escape their everyday activities and return to their occupations feeling refreshed (Figure 2).

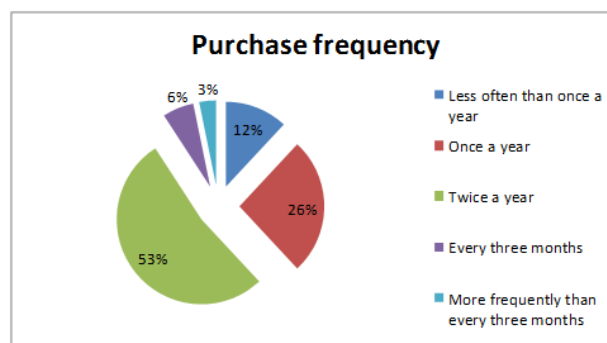


Figure 2. *The holiday purchase frequency amongst respondents*  
(Source: created by the author)

In terms of the average number of nights for a holiday selected by respondents, most of them

choose a holiday of 7 nights/trip (48%), followed by 10 nights/trip (21%), while the least of them (7%) choose to spend more than 10 nights in their holiday destination (Figure 3).

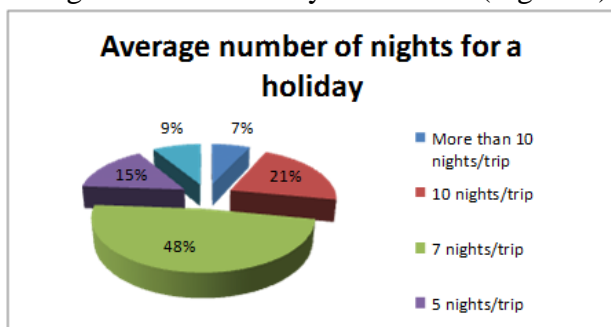


Figure 3. The average number of nights for a holiday (Source: created by the author)

There is a relation that is worth noting between the number of holidays taken by the respondents/year and the number of nights spent by them on their chosen trip. Thus, the more frequent the respondents' holidays, the less their number of nights, while, for respondents who take holidays more rarely, the number of nights increases and they choose to spend more time in the respective destination. Similar to the first, as well as the second category of tourists, tourist agencies and hoteliers can capitalize their customers' travel and consumption habits and can establish a brand promotion and identification strategy with the values promoted by the company. Another result of the study indicates that the most sought after method through which consumers purchase a tourist package is the search for a tourist agency (69%), while only 31% of the respondents resort to their individual search (Figure 4). Concerning the reasons determining them to select a specific tourist agency (and, thus, their orientation towards a specific brand) to purchase their holiday package, the respondents were particularly won over by the reliability of the agency they have turned to (84%), the price they have charged (73%) and the recommendations received from their friends (67%), while the least of them have mentioned promotional campaigns, flyers or street advertising (17%), (Figure 5).

In order to notice what they appreciate most in a

tourist agency and what they do not appreciate at all or to a very low extent, the respondents were given a list with a series of positive and negative sentences, in relation to which they could express their approval or disapproval. The proposed statements refer to the most important criteria considered by a client when buying a holiday (Figure 6).

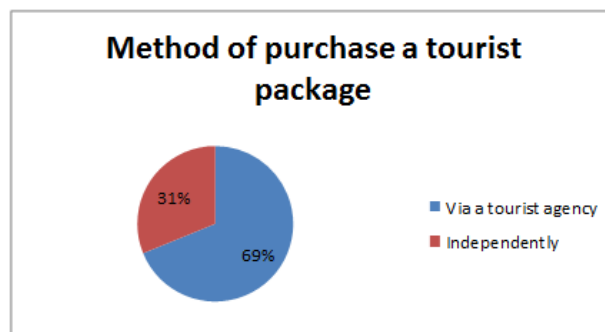


Figure 4. Method of purchase a tourist package (Source: created by the author)

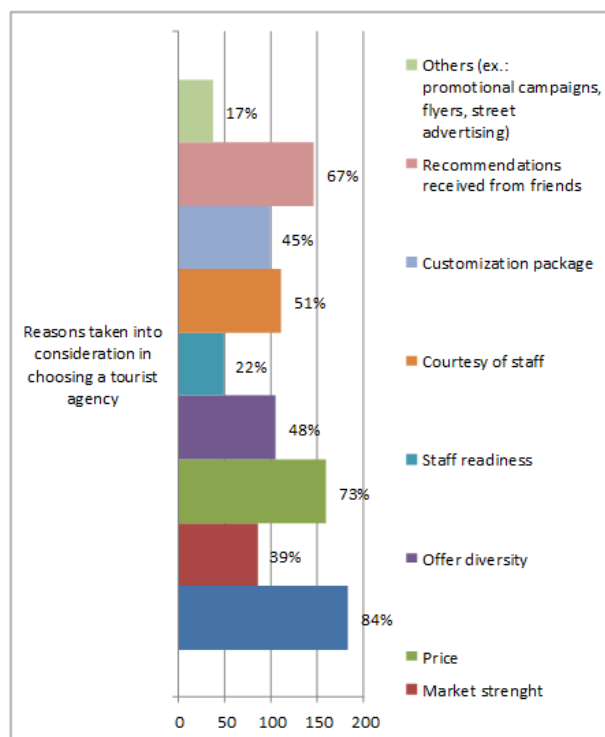


Figure 5. Reasons taken into consideration in choosing a tourist agency (Source: created by the author)

The results show that, based on the agency it has used in the past or with which it continues to collaborate in the present, the respondents



have formed a general impression of the provided services, they know them and they have decided, based on their previous level of satisfaction, to use its services again or not, to turn to another competitor or to organize their holiday individually.

Concerning the importance and relevance of the brand for potential tourists, the respondents have stated that between choosing a specific brand and a quality service, from a less known brand, they would choose the second version. The main arguments were the fact that the interest for a tourist service brand increases when they are high quality, and they would also like to benefit from the services of the respective companies involved in the performance of the holiday later. For example, if a hotel provided satisfactory accommodation and meal services (as applicable) to the respondent, whose provision level has met the classification of the hotel unit or has exceeded it, it will be tempted to return, thus attracting the remembering of the brand by reminding them, through the repetition of the experience and the promotion thereof in its circle of friends.

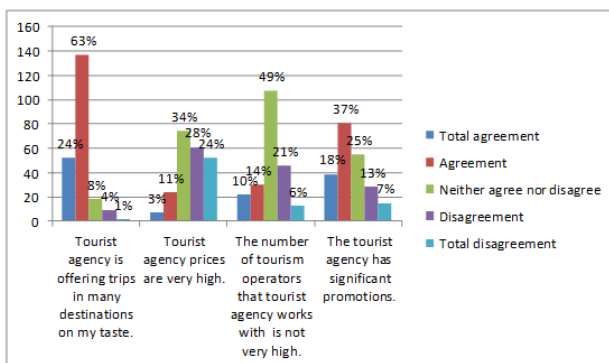


Figure 6. *Issues among respondents rated on tourist agency*  
(Source: created by the author)

Moreover, another case where the respondent's attention could be drawn by a brand can be, for example, a tourist agency brand. If the agency has locations that the respondent (the potential client) wants, looks for or visits frequently, in its list of destinations and in its service offer, it will draw its attention and will stimulate it to

become its client, thus establishing a brand identification level. For example, a tourist who enjoys travelling to the seaside in foreign countries, in accessible resorts, providing a full service package, will be attracted by an agency promoting holidays in Turkey, Greece, Spain and other countries that are appreciated and extremely sought after by Romanians as holiday destinations.

Having analyzed the answers provided by the persons interviewed with the questionnaire, concerning the relevant issues for them in relation to the brand, certain significant criteria are established in improving the brand policy at the level of tourist companies. Table 1 shows the characteristics that the tourist agency brand, which consumers turn to when buying a tourist package, should meet in relation to the offered tourist service.

Table 1. *Tourist agency brand characteristics relevant to consumers in buying a tourist package*

No.	Elements defining the tourist agency brand	General score
1.	Provided destinations	96
2.	Launched promotions	92
3.	Level of charged prices	98
4.	Discounts provided to families with children	63
5.	The option to select between several companies with which the agency collaborated (e.g. carriers, hotels, etc.)	74
6.	The availability of Early booking discounts	93
7.	The relation developed with the tourist agency	81
8.	Maintaining interest by sending offers periodically	59
9.	Customer care	76
10.	Meeting a travel budget and creating a customized offer, based on it	87

Respondents were requested to give a score between 0 and 100 points to each travel agency characteristic they find relevant. The lowest score given by a respondent on a column could

be 0 points for all the submitted characteristics, and the maximum score could be 1000 points. The granted general score, found in table 1 was obtained by calculating the arithmetic average for each characteristic, based on the score given by the 218 respondents. Thus, the result was that the most representative issue for respondents was "Provided destinations", since it collected the highest given score.

In terms of the age of the research participants, the majority meets the 36-55 years interval, and most have a monthly income over RON 2000.

## 5 Conclusions

Following the research performed in the tourist fair, the respondents' tendency to use tourist agencies was established, as a method to organize their holiday, to the detriment of their individual organization. Despite the fact that the Internet is a very important source of information concerning hotels, plane tickets or other means of transportation, restaurants and entertainment companies, Bucharest inhabitants prefer, either out of commodity or due to their lack of time, to pay a specialized agency for such search and information services.

The largest part of travelers who organize their holidays individually are young people, under 35 years old, who, however, also assess the tourist agency offers in advance, to compare the price and the seasonal peak periods.

The brand proves to be an element that is worthy of being taken into consideration, since it matters for customers when identifying their needs, preferences and expectations. Despite the fact that the respondents have specified that they prefer specific tourist agencies, they justify their selection through the fact that specific agencies meet certain criteria that are relevant for them in relation to the holiday they have purchased.

Thus, in order for a brand to be chosen by consumers, it should be more than just a name or a company with tradition in the tourism industry. The brand should be established through the developing company's staff, the services and products provided to tourists, the

notion of authenticity, respected and promoted values, consideration and care paid to the tourist, the meeting of the tourist's needs on destination, support and a relation based on trust and the understanding of the current and potential customers' material and emotional needs.

Managerial implications of the subject matter dealt with consist of the presentation measure in which the trade mark is relevant to the consumer at the time of selection vacation package and the use of results obtained in creating a business centered on promoting brand awareness and orientation business on the basis of aspects of the brand that the consumer appreciates and he was looking for in it selections.

So, as a result of the conclusions obtained it is to be noted that business development can be achieved, from the point of view presented in the article, by means of the integration in tourist package promoted by companies present in the tourism sector of the most important aspects that define brand, in the acceptance consumers surveyed. They are: destinations offered, the level of prices charged, discounts offered to customers and maintained a good relationship with the customer through respect, reliability and professionalism.

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