

Gender Differences in Tourism Marketing Product Perceptions

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Abstract

This study explores package holiday travelers' perceptions of tourism product attributes from the gender perspective. The research results reveal that significant differences exist in perceived levels of tourism product attributes between men and women. The perceptions of females were higher than those of males for all the statistically significant features in each of two categories of tourism product attributes. Tour package features such as hotels, price/quality relationship, and standard of the bus as well as selected experience attributes, including tourist attractions, nature/countryside, shopping opportunities, safety, cleanliness, tourist information, and possibility to communicate in English were evaluated significantly higher by females. Several managerial implications for both tourism marketing strategists and tourism marketing product providers are discussed in this study.

Keywords: tourism, perceptions, gender.

JEL classification: L83, M31.

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the world economy, currently supporting 319 million jobs worldwide and generating 10.4% of world GDP. In 2018, the travel and tourism industry experienced 3.9% growth outperforming the global economy (World Travel & Tourism Council). For many countries in Europe and elsewhere, tourism is one of the most important sources of revenue playing a leading role in providing jobs. Thus it is really important to focus heavily on marketing effectively to tourists.

The total contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP of the economy of Poland was 4.5%, whereas the direct contribution was 1.9% of total GDP in 2018. Travel and tourism supported 332,000 jobs directly (2% of total employment). The combined total of direct and indirect tourism jobs was some 736,800 or 4.5% of total employment. International visitor impact accounted for 4.6% of total exports. (World Travel & Tourism Council)

Due to the impact of tourism on the socio-economic development of the country and its positive prospects, as well as favorable forecasts predicting a faster pace of tourism growth in Poland than in the EU and in the world, in the perspective of 2018-2028, a profound research of tourists' perceptions of Poland as a tourist destination is required. It is also important to note that Poland is not perceived as a typical tourist destination; however, due to its cultural and natural heritage as well as investment in tourism infrastructure, the country has a lot of tourism potential (Johann, 2014).

The detailed information regarding tourists' needs and preferences is crucial for tourism marketing strategists and tourism marketing product providers to develop well suited packages and services for tourists as well as to design effective marketing communication. Thus, the characteristics of foreign visitors as well as their travel behavior need to be taken into

consideration in research studies in order to better understand travelers' preferences. A number of studies have been performed in order to examine travelers' cultural and socio-psychological differences in tourism product perceptions; however, few have concentrated on gender specifics, especially in a Polish context.

The tourism literature has examined gender differences in travel and consumer behavior from varied perspectives. For example, Frew and Shaw (1999) investigated the differences between men and women in the context of personality and tourist behavior. Uysal, McGehee and Loker-Murphy (1996) focused on associations between gender and tourism motivations. Yet, not much attention has been paid to the issue of gender differences in tourism product perceptions from the perspective of package holiday travelers.

Hence, the current study attempts to compare males' and females' perceptions of Poland as a tourist destination. We focus on two categories of tourism product attributes in our research. One is closely related to actual tour package features and the other is more related to different experiences that tourists had during their tourist visit. We highlight the marketing implications of our data analysis.

2. Literature Review

Gender differences can be observed in numerous different domains and have been documented in many empirical studies. The study of personality is particularly important for understanding how men and women differ in the ways in which they think, feel, and behave (Weisberg, DeYoung and Hirsh, 2011) since this might influence their consumption patterns.

Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) conducted the first extensive review of research on gender differences with respect to personality. They found that men were more assertive and less anxious than women; however, no differences were noticed with regard to locus of control and self-esteem. Further studies have thrown new light on sex-related differences in cognition, temperament, and social behavior. Feingold (1994) revealed that women were higher than men on trust, anxiety, gregariousness, and tendermindedness and lower on assertiveness. Costa, Terracciano and McCrae (2001) found that women perceived themselves to be more agreeable, neurotic, warm and open to feelings whereas men reported themselves to be more assertive and open to ideas. Moreover, they suggest that gender differences vary across cultures and are more significant in European and American cultures.

A broader context of association between personality and sustainable consumer behavior was emphasized by Luchs and Mooradian (2011). They stated that more open and more agreeable consumers are more likely to be concerned with social and environmental issues. The results of other studies show that women attach more importance than men to social concerns (Eagly, Diekmann, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Koenig, 2004) and environmental concerns (Zelezny, Chua, and Aldrich, 2000). Thus, a sustainable tourism concept seems to be more persuasive for women. Frew and Shaw (1999) have addressed the issue of personality and tourist behavior. They found that there were significant associations between the respondents' personality types, their gender, and their willingness to visit specific tourist attractions. In other studies researchers investigated also tourists' motivations from the gender perspective.

Travel motivations are generally explained by the theory of push and pull motivations. While push factors give tourists a reason to travel, pull factors explain their choice of destination (Dann, 1977, 1981). Crompton (1979) distinguished seven socio-psychological motives (push factors) not linked to destination features and two cultural motives (pull factors) related to the qualities of a destination. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) stated that push factors correspond to the needs and preferences of travelers, such as desire to escape from routine, relaxation, need to experience adventure, expectation of social interaction, whereas pull factors

are the characteristics pertaining to the destination, such as image, natural beauty, tourist attractions, recreation facilities. Moreover, they examined the nature and extent of the reciprocal relationship between push and pull factors. This correlation was found to be associated with IsoAhola's (1980) escape-seeking theory. In another research Uysal, McGehee and Loker-Murphy (1996) investigated gender differences in tourism motivations of Australian leisure travelers. Their findings revealed that women placed different importance on some push and pull factors than men. According to research results, women attach more importance to such push factors as cultural experience, family and kinship, and prestige while men rated sports and adventure as a more significant factor. Several pull factors including budgetary environment, comfort and relaxation, and heritage and culture were ranked highly for both men and women, yet, they were more significant for women.

Meng and Uysal (2008) gave more insight into the effects of sex-related differences on perceptions of destination attributes. They explored gender differences in perceived importance of destination attributes, travel motivations, and travel values with regard to nature-based tourism. They revealed that most destination attributes were more important for women than for men. Women ranked high the importance of natural scenery and various recreational activities, whereas men tended to seek action and adventure in their travel experience. Although no significant difference between men and women was observed in the importance of motivation, it was noted that women were more motivated by relaxation and restfulness while men were more triggered by physical activities and having fun. Moreover, their findings demonstrated many similarities with results of previous studies on gender differences (McCleary, Weaver and Lan, 1994; Freysinger, 1995; Uysal, McGehee and Loker-Murphy, 1996).

Customer satisfaction has been also a dominant theme of research due to its role as a key driver of enterprise growth and profitability (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann, 1994; Hallowell, 1996). In the tourism context, the research results show that there is a relationship between experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and tourists' behavioral intentions (Chen and Chen, 2010). Moreover, tourist satisfaction with a destination is correlated with the destination image (Chon, 1992; Chen and Tsai, 2007). Thus, detailed information regarding tourists' perceptions is crucial for tourism marketing strategists and tourism product providers in order to design effective marketing strategy.

It is evident that demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors affect tourist perceptions. Therefore, we assume that there are likely to be some differences between men's and women's perceptions of their holiday experience. In the present study we examine effects of gender differences on perceptions of different kinds of tourism product attributes, including experience factors and tour package features.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data collection and sample design

The questionnaire was developed based on the literature, interviews, discussions with experts, and the results from previous studies. The first section of the questionnaire contained questions regarding socio-demographic aspects of individual respondents, such as age, gender, place of residence, as well as questions concerning travel motives and patterns. The second part of the questionnaire included questions related to customers' perceptions of tour package features and different experiences that visitors had during their tourist visit, overall satisfaction, and willingness to recommend the tour. Moreover, the questionnaire contained open-ended questions where tourists could express their opinions regarding their holidays. The qualitative research was conducted by the questionnaire survey. Survey respondents rated tourism product attributes on seven point rating scales.

The data were gathered from travelers who were on coach holidays in Poland in 2014-15. The tours were sold by tour operators and travel agents in the USA, Canada, Australia, Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Mexico. The tours were guided either in English or in Spanish and Portuguese. The tour program included visits to important places and tourist attractions in Poland. The subjects were selected by adopting a convenience sampling method. Pencil-and-paper questionnaires were distributed among tour participants after each tour. A total of 463 valid questionnaires were collected. The profile of survey respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of survey respondents

Description			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Valid	Female	297	64.1	64.1	64.1
		Male	166	35.9	35.9	100.0
		Total	463	100.0	100.0	
	Missing Total	System	0	0.0		
		Total	463	100.0		
Age	Valid	under 20	11	2.4	2.6	2.6
		21–30	18	3.9	4.3	6.9
		31–40	20	4.3	4.8	11.7
		41–50	35	7.6	8.4	20.1
		51–60	88	19.0	21.0	41.1
		61–70	169	36.5	40.3	81.4
		over 70	78	16.8	18.6	100.0
		Total	419	90.5	100.0	
		Missing Total	System	44	9.5	
	Total		463	100.0		
Country of residence	Valid	United States	260	56.1	57.1	57.1
		Spain	61	13.2	13.4	70.5
		Australia	48	10.4	10.6	81.1
		Canada	36	7.8	7.9	89.0
		Brazil	17	3.7	3.7	92.7
		Portugal	9	1.9	2.0	94.7
		Argentina	4	0.9	0.9	95.6
		Other countries	20	4.3	4.4	100.0
		Total	455	98.3	100.0	
		Missing Total	System	8	1.7	
	Total		463	100.0		

3.2 Variables

In the present research, we wanted to understand how the important demographic variable of gender might drive customer perceptions. A large number of both males and females come to Poland as tourists. Like tourists anywhere, they are interested in sightseeing of different kinds. Tourism companies try to facilitate their travel experiences by offering them different types of tourism packages. We want to study consumer perceptions of such different aspects of tourism attributes, and understand if gender was a driving force in difference in such consumer perceptions.

Drawing from the above discussion, we focused on two categories of attributes in our research. One was related to the actual tour package features and the other was related to the different experiences that tourists had during their tourist visit.

Once we understand how consumer perceptions varied across females and males, it would be possible for tour companies to tailor their offerings so that they could improve customer perceptions of their tourism experience.

3.3 Data analysis

We wanted to determine if there were any statistically significant differences in the attribute perceptions of males and females. We therefore estimated the following general model:

$$Y_{ij} = \mu + \tau_i + \epsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{ij} represents the j -th observation ($j = 1, 2, \dots, n_i$) on the i -th treatment ($i = 1, 2$ in our case). So Y_{i14} would represent the fourth observation using level 1 of the factor. μ is the common effect for the whole study, τ_i is the i -th treatment effect and ϵ_{ij} captures the random error occurring in the j -th observation on the i -th factor. This is the model representation of analysis of variance.

4. Results

From Table 2 we can observe that consumer perceptions of three out of the seven actual tour package features are statistically significantly affected by the gender of the tourists. The variables are significant at $p < .005$, $p \leq .05$ and $p < .06$. These features are hotels, price/quality relationship, and standard of the bus. The impact of gender on hotels perception was the most strongly significant. The perceptions of females were significantly larger than that of males for each of these three features. There were no significant gender differences in perceptions for the other four features.

Table 2. Statistical relationships between gender and actual tour package features for tourists in their visit to Poland

Independent Variable (Gender)	Dependent Variable (Attribute Perceptions)	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attractiveness of the program	Between Groups	.557	1	.557	.849	.357
	Within Groups	302.359	461	.656		
	Total	302.916	462			
Organization	Between Groups	1.111	1	1.111	1.885	.170
	Within Groups	271.654	461	.589		
	Total	272.765	462			
Hotels	Between Groups	7.382	1	7.382	8.996	.003
	Within Groups	378.268	461	.821		
	Total	385.650	462			
Restaurants and meals	Between Groups	.866	1	.866	.793	.374
	Within Groups	503.890	461	1.093		
	Total	504.756	462			
Standard of the bus	Between Groups	2.956	1	2.956	3.615	.058
	Within Groups	376.897	461	.818		
	Total	379.853	462			
Tour escort	Between Groups	.053	1	.053	.147	.701
	Within Groups	165.161	461	.358		
	Total	165.214	462			
Price/quality relationship	Between Groups	2.422	1	2.422	3.863	.050
	Within Groups	289.085	461	.627		
	Total	291.508	462			

Table 3 indicates that perceptions of seven out of the thirteen experience aspects of the tourists' visit to Poland were statistically significantly affected by the gender of the tourists. These attributes were tourist attractions, nature/countryside, shopping opportunities, safety,

cleanliness, tourist information, and possibility to communicate in English. The impact of gender on cleanliness perception was the most strongly significant. For each of these cases of statistical significance, the mean perception levels of females were greater than those of males.

Table 3. Statistical relationships between gender and experience aspects of the tourists' visit to Poland

Independent Variable (Gender)						
Dependent Variable (Attribute Perceptions)		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Climate, atmosphere of your stay	Between Groups	1.957	1	1.957	2.118	.146
	Within Groups	426.026	461	.924		
	Total	427.983	462			
Tourist attractions	Between Groups	4.033	1	4.033	6.761	.010
	Within Groups	274.982	461	.596		
	Total	279.015	462			
Nature, countryside	Between Groups	3.324	1	3.324	4.081	.044
	Within Groups	375.479	461	.814		
	Total	378.803	462			
Shopping opportunities	Between Groups	8.321	1	8.321	7.174	.008
	Within Groups	534.720	461	1.160		
	Total	543.041	462			
Safety	Between Groups	4.620	1	4.620	8.981	.003
	Within Groups	237.130	461	.514		
	Total	241.749	462			
Opportunity to meet new people	Between Groups	3.263	1	3.263	2.547	.111
	Within Groups	590.439	461	1.281		
	Total	593.702	462			
Entertainment	Between Groups	1.054	1	1.054	.849	.357
	Within Groups	572.609	461	1.242		
	Total	573.663	462			
Weather	Between Groups	1.223	1	1.223	.824	.364
	Within Groups	683.715	461	1.483		
	Total	684.937	462			
Cleanliness	Between Groups	6.278	1	6.278	11.477	.001
	Within Groups	252.163	461	.547		
	Total	258.441	462			
Reasonable prices	Between Groups	1.768	1	1.768	2.655	.104
	Within Groups	307.040	461	.666		
	Total	308.808	462			
Tourist information	Between Groups	4.713	1	4.713	7.520	.006
	Within Groups	288.924	461	.627		
	Total	293.637	462			
Kindness to foreigners	Between Groups	2.045	1	2.045	2.203	.138
	Within Groups	428.076	461	.929		
	Total	430.121	462			
Possibility to communicate in English	Between Groups	4.491	1	4.491	3.769	.053
	Within Groups	549.371	461	1.192		
	Total	553.862	462			

5. Discussions and Marketing Implications

Tourism is an important revenue earner in Poland and its growth prospects are also substantial. Thus there is a need to study how tourists perceive different attributes of their stay in the country so that companies can best market their packages for future visitors to Poland. We have focused on the market segments of females and males to see how they perceive various kinds of tourism attributes.

Our research shows that significant gender differences exist in the perception of numerous tourism product attributes. The perception ratings of females were higher than those of males for all the statistically significant features in each of the two categories of tourism product attributes. Perceptions of tour package features such as hotels, price/quality relationship, and standard of the bus as well as a number of experience aspects of the visit, including tourist attractions, nature/countryside, shopping opportunities, safety, cleanliness, tourist information, and possibility to communicate in English, were significantly higher for females than for males.

The research results suggest a number of gender-based implications for tourism marketing strategists and tourism product providers. The main conclusion of the study is that it is important to develop well-suited packages adjusted to the males and females needs and preferences. Due to lower males' evaluations of several tourism product attributes, it is important to identify how best tour marketers can improve the perceptions of the male segment especially for those attributes. Future research could focus on doing in-depth interviews with both males and females to understand what the reasons are for males' perceptions for so many different attributes to be significantly lower than those of females. Once the reasons are known, actions can be taken to modify the nature of specifically those attributes in an appropriate way.

Future research could study what kinds of additional features might cause males to find tourism packages in Poland to be considered more attractive than they are at present to them. Tour operators need to develop tourism products more appealing and attractive to men. The tour itinerary could for example, include more challenging and exciting activities (e.g., sports, events, games, shows), adventurous activities (e.g., rafting, cable car ride), attractions involving tourists' active participation, regional food and alcoholic drinks tasting. On a cautionary note, tourism marketers need to ensure that their product offerings continue to be appealing to the female segment. For instance, marketers may consider providing shopping situations where not only men get chances to buy sports accessories, video games, fishing equipment, and alcoholic products, but also women get a chance to buy clothes, cosmetics and souvenirs and so on. These specific suggestions are only examples drawn partly from the literature review in our paper, which indicated that men liked sports and adventure, physical activities and fun and other similar things. Future research would have to identify a set of such attributes more precisely.

A fundamental finding of our study is that there are both similarities and differences in the perceptions of the female and male segments of visitors to Poland. For many attributes, perception levels are similar, while for many other specific attributes the differences are clearly statistically significant. We identify these two clusters of attributes from the ones considered in this study. This is the first step towards helping tour marketers in Poland to better design their product offerings. In the shorter run, marketers could modify these attributes appropriately. In the longer run, they could also add new attributes in their packages; of course the potential impact of these new attributes should be pretested in test markets by utilizing research endeavors like ours.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Conclusions of this study are limited to groups of tourists similar in overall nature to our sample, and can be only applicable in the Polish tourism market. Thus, future research on this topic could be carried out in other countries in Europe and elsewhere in the world, for us to have a broader perspective on gender differences with regard to tourism marketing and consumers' perceptions in this domain. Moreover, the study explores travelers' perceptions of tourism product attributes only from a gender perspective. In the future, gender differences could be analyzed along with geographic, psychographic, and demographic characteristics of

tourists. Because convenience sampling decreases the generalizability of the results, in further studies, it is also possible to use other sampling techniques to improve the sampling reliability. Despite above limitations, our study supports previous findings, gives a new insight into gender differences in a context of package holiday tourism and provides numerous important implications for tourism practitioners and for researchers of tourist behavior.

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